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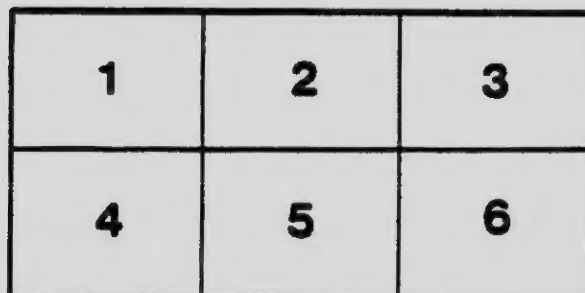
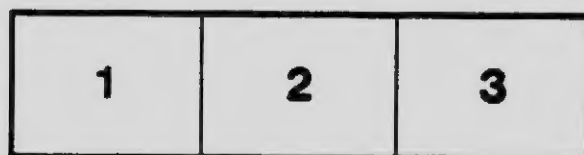
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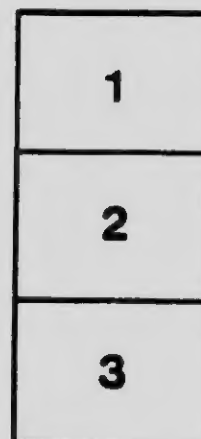
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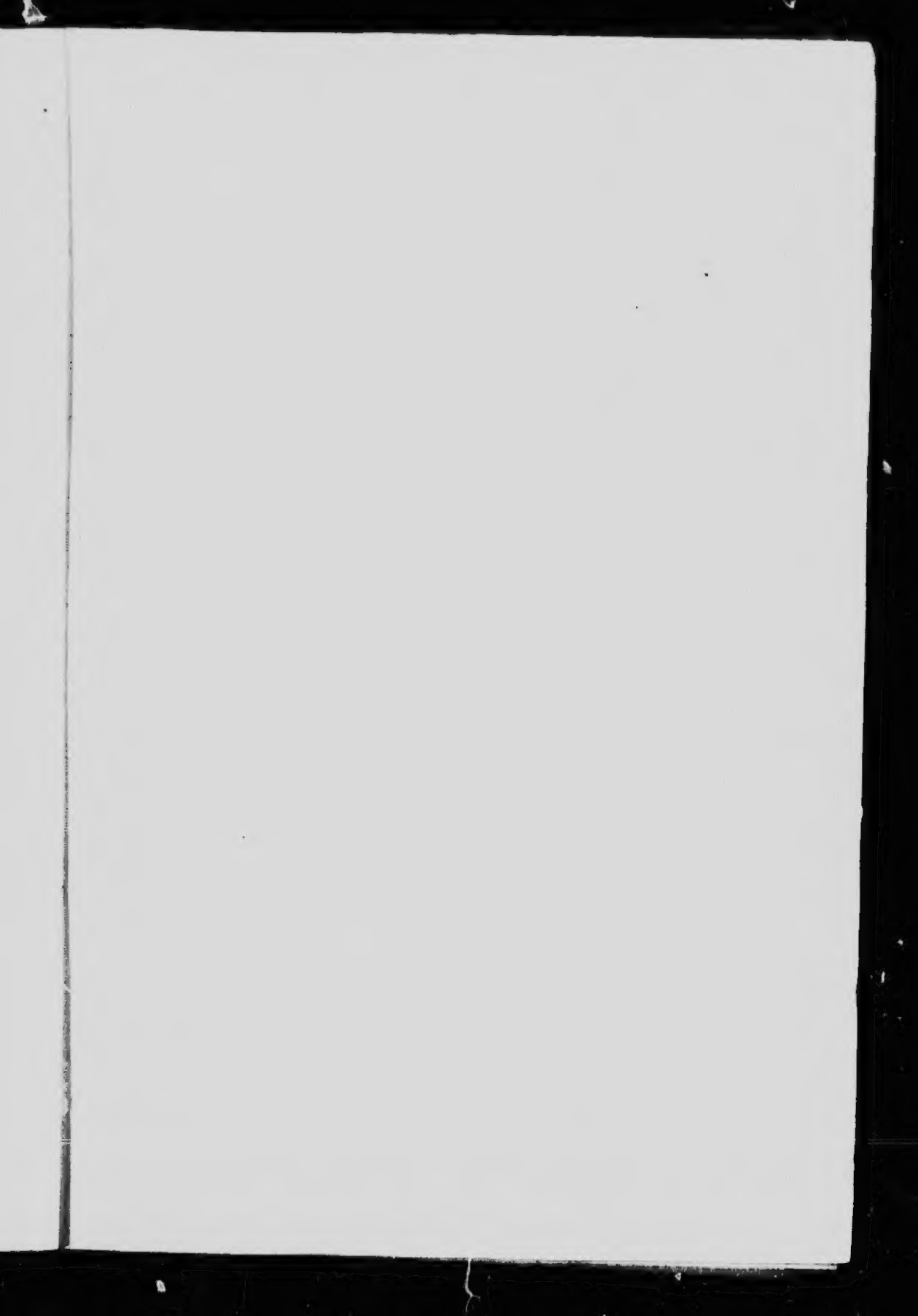
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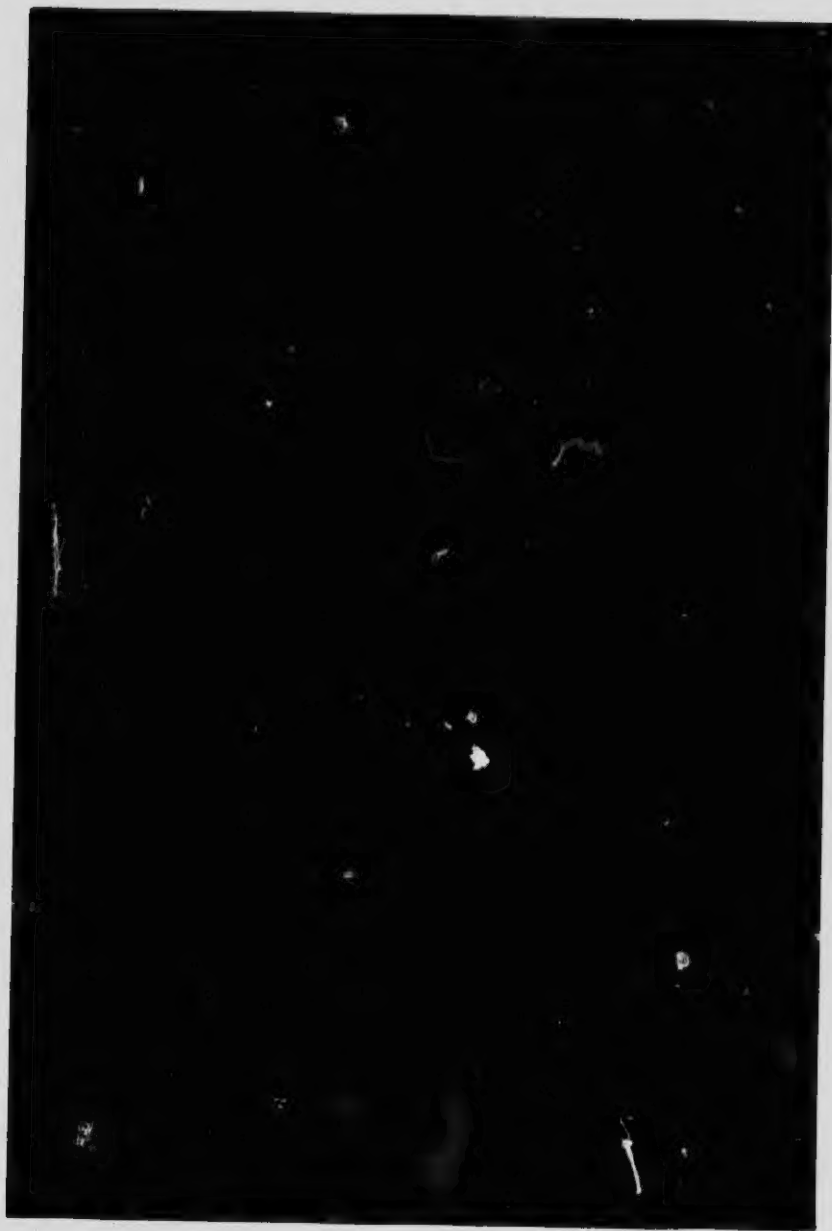


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"STEP BY STEP. NEARER. NEARER. UNTIL HE TOUCHED AIRY HANDS THAT  
CLUNG. THAT DREW HIM TO THE HEART OF MYSTERY."—Page 237

# THE GHOST GARDEN

1871

BY J. L. GILES

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY J. L. GILES

AND A. L. GILES

NEW YORK

1871

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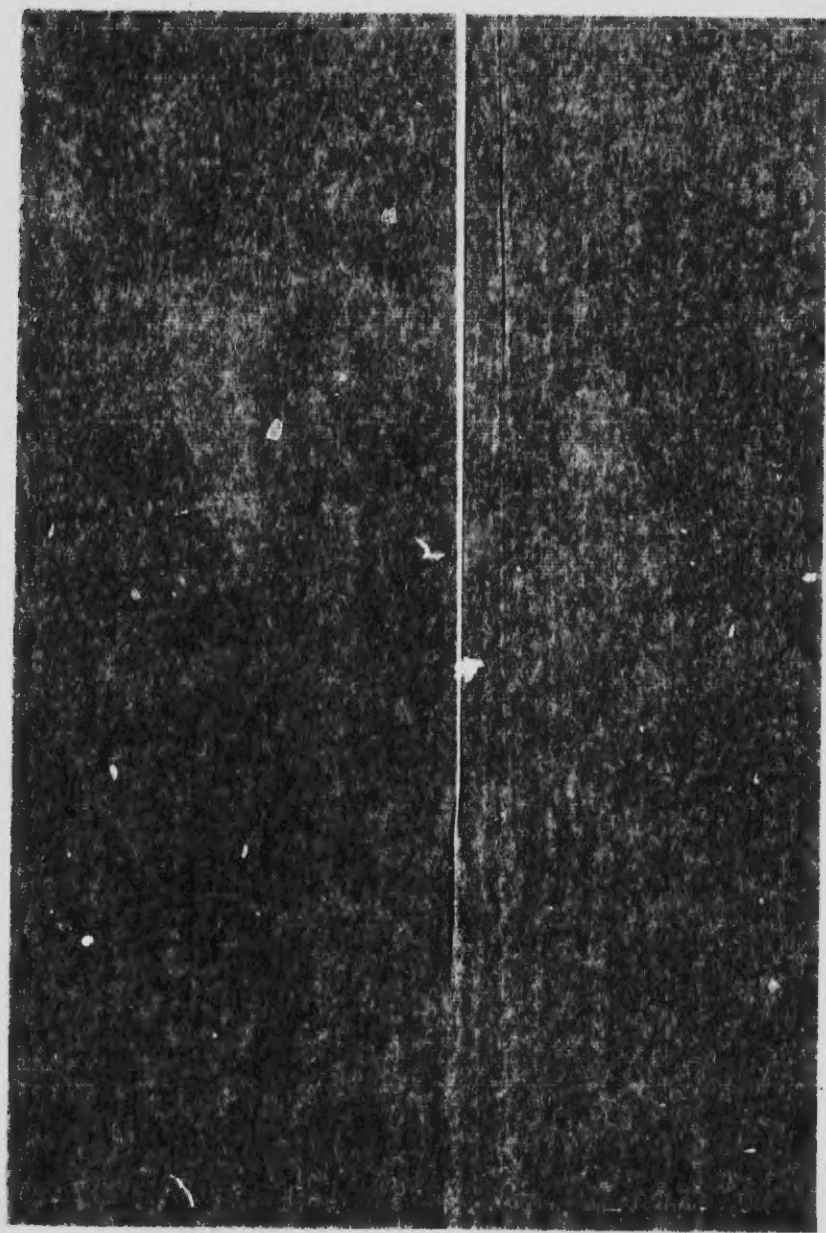
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TOP BY STEEL-ARMED ROBBER; COIL OF LOANED AIRY HANDS THAT  
PLUNGED HIM TO THE FLOOR OF STORY.—Page 427

# THE GHOST GARDEN

A NOVEL

BY

AMÉLIE RIVES  
(PRINCESS TROUBETSKOY)

*Author of "The Quick or the Dead,"  
"World's-End," "Shadows of Flames," etc.*

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY  
GEORGE W. HOOD



TORONTO  
S. B. GUNDY

PS3092

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1918

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TO  
MY DEAREST SISTER  
LANDON RIVES

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I  
F

# THE GHOST GARDEN

## I

**I** S'POSE, bein' from the city, you don't believe in 'hants'?" observed Joel Carver, turning from a last fruitless survey of the interlaced branches above them.

"'Hants'?" repeated Radford.

"'Ghosses,' some folks call 'em," explained Carver.

"Oh—ghosts. Why not? Why shouldn't town people believe in ghosts as well as country people?" asked Radford. "And what made you think of them suddenly like that?"

"Well," said Joel slowly, "we've got to go by the old Horsemanden place to get to Mr. Warrenger's, and they say it's hanted."

Radford was keen in an instant, far keener than he had been to find the wild turkeys in search of which he and Joel had been tramping over the mountains for three hours. He was a half-hearted sportsman at best. The stalking of game was the only part of the sport that he really enjoyed. He disliked killing things, and nothing could have induced him to shoot a deer.

It was because of Steve's insistency that he had set



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off on this "turkey hunt" with Joel Carver. Steve had been called to Washington on business the night before, but he assured Radford that if the man existed who could be *sure* of knowing where wild turkeys were going to roost, that man was his manager, Joel Carver. As for Radford's leaving Virginia without a shot at a wild turkey, it was simply out of the question.

However, when they reached the point on Smoke Mountain where Joel had made sure the wild turkeys would be roosting, there was, as he disgustingly observed, "Nary a turkey."

"Some darkey's got after 'em, darn him!" he told Radford.

It seemed that the way to hunt wild turkeys was to find them roosting, flush them, then come back before daybreak next morning, build a blind, and call to them on a queer little instrument made out of one of their own wing-bones.

A neighbour and friend of Steve's, a Mr. Hamilton Warrenger, had kindly offered to put the two men up for the night.

It was November, a still evening of Indian Summer. The sun had dropped behind the mountains, but a full, pale moon shone in the East. All about them was the forest. The only sound came from the dead leaves through which they walked.

"This ain't no wild turkey hunt," mourned Joel; "it's a wild goose chase, that's what it is. I'm sorry to 'a'

## THE GHOST GARDEN 3

brought you on such a fool climb, Mr. Radford, I cert'ny am."

"Well, you needn't be," said Radford cheerfully. "I never enjoyed a tramp more, and you know I told you I wasn't much of a shot."

"Yes, sir; you did. But every man had *ought* to shoot a wild turkey befo' he dies. It cert'ny is disagreeable to get disapp'inted like this; it cert'ny is."

"Look here," said Radford suddenly, smiling and stopping short. "I'm going to make a confession that will comfort you. I'd a great deal rather hear about the 'hant' at the old Horsemenden place, than shoot a wild turkey."

Joel fixed his pale blue eyes on him wonderingly.

"'S that so?" he asked, incredulous.

"That's so," answered Radford.

Joel shifted his gun and fingered it lovingly.

"Well, that cert'ny is cuyous," he said at last. "Wild turkeys is so oncommon, and hants is so common."

"Common!" exclaimed Radford. "Have *you* ever seen one?"

"Yes, sir. I cert'ny have . . . more'n one. Mountain folks jest naturally sees hants, I reckon."

He trudged on, his pale eyes still peering upward right and left among the trees, in case a roosting turkey might escape him.

"Do you mind talking about it?" asked Radford.

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The pale eyes came down to him, surprised. "Why, no, I do not. It's right interesting when you come to ponder it. It cert'ny is."

"When did you first see one? What was it like?" urged Radford, eager as a boy.

"The first one? Well, I was a little feller and I was coming along a piece of hanted road at dusk. A coach-and-four was what hanted it, and I seen the coach-and-four."

"What was it like?"

"Well, it looked real. I jumped outer the road, and it passed me and the swingle-bars was a-swingin' and the horses latherin', but what was cuyous was the way it went along without no noise—like the shadder of a buzzard over snow."

"And what else have you seen?"

"Well, I met the Man in White that hants another piece of road on Buck Mountain. He come up to me looking mighty ugly and I hit at him wi'h a hickory-stick I was carryin'. I didn't know he wan't real till the stick went through him."

"What was *he* like?"

"Like a natural man."

"You feel sure you've seen these things?"

"Well, I cert'ny wan't *dreaming*. After I hit *through* that hant on Buck Mountain, I ran nigh two mile home, I was that startled—come near busting my heart, the doctor said. But I'm used to 'em now. Our

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preacher told me how to treat 'em. They cyarn't speak to you lest you speak first. You must say: 'In the Lord's name, in the Name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, wlat do you want?' Then they can answer. It's right disagreeable sometimes when they *do* answer. It cert'ny is."

Radford looked searchingly at the countryman's long, tranquil profile, as he walked beside him. If he was a liar, or crazy, he was certainly the most placid of his kind. He talked of "hants" as naturally as he talked of wild turkeys. Radford was about to question him further, when they came out of the forest into a little clearing on the mountain top. The afterglow was still too vivid for the moon to cast shadows, but it was the hour when colours are felt rather than seen.

On their right, the mountains fell away, towards the valley, rose again, interlaced, parted, to give a glimpse of the vast, blue rampart of other mountains more distant still, brooding against the dead gold of the West. To their left the Piedmont Country swept away far below them, one hundred and twenty miles straight to the sea. That distant band of mauvish pearl, Radford could have sworn *was* the sea.

"When we get round that rock," Joel was saying, pointing to the southwest, "you can see 'Her Wish.'"

"'Her Wish?'" repeated Radford. "What's that?"

"The old Horsemanden place. It's on the southern flank of Mist Mountain, a mighty rich, pretty-laying

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piece of land, it cert'ny is too—but mournful seeming. The shadows fall early there. The mountain's so nigh over it."

They passed round the big, lichen-crustcd boulder, and Joel, pointing again, said: "There 'tis."

Radford did not say anything. The strangest sensation had come over him with the sight of the old house among its terraces and sombre, crowding evergreens. It was not only that feeling that almost every one has had at times—the feeling of having been in the same place under the same circumstances before—it was less vague, stronger. He had the emotion of one who, long absent from a beloved home, sees it after years of exile. It was a rush of moved reminiscence, as poignant as that which perfumes sometimes bring.

Those old, creamy stucco walls, appearing and disappearing among their clustered trees, seemed more familiar and more dear than the walls of the house in which he had been born. The gardens with their solid hedges of tree-box, plummy on top for want of trimming, gave him a pang as of a half-remembered romance, that had ended in tragedy.

This queer "possessed" feeling lasted only a few seconds, then he emerged from it as from a dive into dusky waters among strange sea-beings, that had touched and claimed him, and there was Joel still pointing downward, and speaking in his soft, slow singsong. He was saying:

" 'Her Wish,' it's called now, but the name's writ in

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two words, with a big 'H' and a big 'W.' And it really had oughter be called 'Her Wish'—even-like."

"That's a strange name for a place," Radford answered, feeling that he must say something. "Do you know how it came to be called that?"

"Y's, sir, I do," said Joel. "Everybody does. It was built by old Colonel Horsemanden in 1766 to pleasure his only daughter. The first house was burnt down by the Injuns in 1764. They say as how Miss Melany—that was her name—was right wilful, and she set her heart on building a house to suit her own idees. So the old man let her. It's a mighty nice house to look at, but they say it's because of a woman's plannin' it, that the front do' ain't in the middle, and the colyums are more in the right wing than in the left. They say Colonel Horsemanden was mighty proud of it though, and that's how he come to name it 'Her Wish.'"

They had begun walking down towards the hollow as Joel spoke, and now a rise of ground brought them so near that the bitter, fresh scent of the box-hedges floated to them. Again that eerie feeling of reminiscence swept over Radford.

"Do you like that smell?" Joel was asking, when he came to the surface of things a second time. "I do not. It minds me of graveyards. And talkin' of graveyards, there's a grave right in the middle of 'Her Wish' gyarden—the one they call the 'Ghost Gyarden.' They say Miss Melany Horsemanden sot her will on being buried

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there, and the old Colonel didn't cross her no more in death than he done in life, so buried there she cert'ny is. They say it used to be her rose-gyarden. Right in the middle of the roses she tended when she were alive, there's where she lays in death. It do seem a pretty idee but distressin'."

"Is it *her* ghost that haunts the place?" asked Radford in a low voice. As they drew near that garden with its lonely grave, it seemed to him that he must speak in hushed tones.

"That's what they say," answered Joel, also in a more subdued voice.

Near one of the outlying hedges, above its low stone wall, Radford stopped short. The moon was bright and strong now in the darkened heaven. It struck little glitters from the box-leaves, and showed the two men's faces to each other rather pale.

"Would you be . . . a . . . Would you mind going into the gardens?" asked Radford.

Joel answered by another question:

"Would you mind seeing a hant?"

"No—I don't think I should," said Radford.

"All right then," agreed Joel. "If you do not mind, I do not mind. The gates ain't locked." He smiled with some grimness. "There ain't no need to lock the gates of 'Her Wish.'"

They followed the curve of the box-hedge for some ten yards, until they came to high gates of wrought iron,

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rough with rust. The delicate tracery stood out in sharp relief against the bleached, wild grass that had overgrown the lawn beyond. They stood gazing through. It was so still that the silence surged in Radford's ears.

From this point they could see the house, long and low, above its balustraded terraces. The moonlight had not reached it yet. It looked like a shadow or a cloud shaped like a house, resting upon the top of the gently sloping hill.

"You really want to go in?" asked Joel, his hand on the gate.

"Yes," said Radford.

Still Joel hesitated. "If you see anything that startles you, you won't blame me?" he suggested.

"No; of course not," replied Radford.

"Well, then," said Joel; and he pushed open the heavy gate.

It gave on its hinges with a grinding noise that jarred on Radford's nerves. It was like the hoarse growl of an old watch-dog, too old to bite, but not too old to protest. Radford's heart was beating rather fast. It seemed to him that in passing through that gate he had passed some definite boundary line of Fate. It was as if he had entered a spellbound region that claimed him. "Spellbound"—that was the exact expression. That shadow-house drowsing above him was spellbound, there was a spell over these quiet deserted lawns and trees and terraces, and over him.



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Suddenly he turned sharp to the left and walked on quickly.

"Wait!" called Joel. "That ain't the way to the house."

He came after him protesting.

"These grounds is full of tricks. You can get lost in 'em as easy as nothing."

"I shan't get lost," said Radford. "I want to go to the rose-garden first."

"But that ain't the way," urged Joel. "You'd better let me show you. We might get wandering round here for an hour or two. They're laid out that-a-way, these grounds air."

## II

**R**ADFORD said nothing, only walked on, faster than ever. He knew the way. He knew every turn and tangle. Now he went up four old stone steps sunk in a terrace, turned aside, and struck into a flagged walk that led between high walls of Euonymus. The stiff, glossy leaves brushed against him on either side, so long had they been left unclipped. Nesting birds, disturbed by his passing, quhirred and cheeped in the branches.

Joel followed doggedly. He was not afraid of "hants," as he had said, but he rather wished at that moment that one would frighten the "Yankee gentleman." It would be a fool thing to go and lose themselves in the tricky grounds of "Her Wish," with a good hot supper waiting for them at their journey's end.

Then he gave a little gasp of astonishment. Radford had come out into the well-known "Maze" of "Her Wish," and was threading it as swiftly and accurately as if he had planned it himself.

"Gret Gawd! That's cuyous!" thought Joel. "That's *darn* cuyous. I never heerd tell of anybody as could get in and out of that place. It's worse to get out of than a quagmire—and *he's doin' it!*"

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Radford had turned at Joel's cry.

"Just follow me," he now said. "It's quite simple. You turn back at the third row, and go right, then left, then back again, then right."

Joel did so. He emerged beside Radford in a circular, flagged court, still walled in by Euonymus. An arbour of lattice-work, held together by a huge rose-vine, stood before an opening in this wall. Below them, down a flight of stone steps sunk in a grassy terrace, lay the rose-garden.

"Well, sir! That beat's me," murmured Joel. "You come here and through that mixed shrubbery, as if you'd knowed it all your life! It's cuyous. It cert'ny is." And he stared intently at Radford with his pale eyes.

Radford had no wish to share his mystery. He answered practically, and rather curtly, that he was used to such things, and that it was easy to guess that a rose-garden would lay to the south.

"It's mighty cuyous all the same," was Joel's slow retort.

Radford, gazing down at the old sunk-garden, did not answer. Then he said:

"If you don't mind waiting for me, I'll just go down there alone."

"No, I do not mind," replied Joel tranquilly. "I'll set here on these steps till you come back."

The moon was clear of the trees now. It shone upon

## THE GHOST GARDEN 13

the neglected beds of the garden, and turned their matted covering of wild-grass into a silver fleece. On every side, old, unpruned rose-trees threw out fountains of thorny branches. The terrace that shut in the garden was surmounted by a thick hedge of box. The mounded beds looked like the graves of little children. The whole place had the wistful sadness of a lovely woman grown old: of a woman beautiful in her youth, and deserted in her age. Radford came upon a moon-dial. It seemed exquisitely fitting that a shadow should tell him the hour.

Then, hat in hand, he went along a little path set with dwarf-box. He knew where that grave would be. And, as he fore-felt, there among a tangle of rose-trees, he found it.

But at the very instant that he came upon it, something sent the blood flying back upon his heart. This he had not fore-felt. The rose-trees about it were carefully trimmed. The grave was shorn of its wild-grasses; more than this, there were flowers upon it—fresh flowers—roses. He could see them distinctly from where he stood, ten paces away, laid side by side with a loving care that left the fragile blossoms, each with its cheek pressed softly against the grass-cowslip of the grave, but not touching one another. He had a swift thought, as he gazed at them, that the hand that placed them there must be delicate and deft—a woman's hand. Then he went nearer. The headstone was of marble, with raised

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lettering, under a carved Maltese Cross set between two sprigs of laurel. The letters said:

My deare daughter  
MELANY HORSEMANDEN  
Born 1746—Died 1780

Who was it that laid fresh flowers on the grave of a woman dead a hundred and thirty-six years ago?

He closed his eyes a moment, trying to picture this wilful, charming Melany, as she had been at twenty, when her father built that lovely old house for her, and named it "Her Wish." In an instant, gushing about him, warm as if with sunlight, came a surge of perfume—the scent of damask roses. Almost he remembered—almost he saw . . . what his open eyes could not discern. He shook with this "almost." Unclosing his eyes he stepped to the grave—bent over it. But those late autumn roses, chill with the moonlit air, gave forth no perfume.

Again he closed his eyes, but this time there was about him only the fresh, bitter scent of the box-hedges, and the dank odour of autumn leaves from the strewn pathways. He gazed and gazed at the white name on the headstone.

"Melany Horsemanden," he said aloud. "Melany Horsemanden." No one answered. Nothing stirred. No perfume of damask-roses came to him. But he turned away feeling as if rose-scented hair, dust these hundred-odd years, had blown against him.

## THE GHOST GARDEN 15

"Now let us have a look at the house," he said, re-joining Joel on the steps.

"All right," responded Joel, "but it's half-past six o'clock, and Mr. Warrenger's is a long mile further."

He eyed the young man curiously as they went along the weed-grown driveway towards the house.

"Did you get a feelin' of hants down there by that grave?" he asked.

"The whole place has a haunted feeling," evaded Radford. "It would be easy to imagine a ghost in the moonlight between those trees."

"Yes—the autumn mist *do* look hant-like in the moonshine," Joel assented. "But your *real* hants *looks* real."

A wide curve in the driveway disclosed the house—spread long and columned against massed evergreens, box and Euonymus and yew. It was not a large house, but so exquisitely proportioned that it had the nobility of largeness, and also the homely charm that great size so often destroys. The porticoes were low, the columns supporting them and the in-curved wings, of the simplest Doric. The windows were set deep, and Venetian-blinds closed before them. As they looked, the moon, clearing the great beech-trees to the right, lit up the columns of the eastern wing. It was like a chord of noble music, this sudden lighting of the white columns. It seemed to Radford as though each column gave forth a silver note,

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singing magically with the moonlight, as the stone statue of legend sang with the first rays of the sun.

And he knew those columns—they had chimed long ago in the moonlight for him. That he knew, but how it had been with him then, or who had been with him he could not remember. Them he remembered though; he knew their number without counting. In the east wing they were eight, and in the west wing seven. A girl's mistake, carried out faithfully by the builder. And yet, could one call anything mistaken when the whole result was so lovely? No—the old house had the charm of an irregular face—doubtless the charm that had been Melany's. "Her Wish." It was well-named; doubtless in some strange way it was like her, held her wilfulness in its irregular columns and the strange turns and twists of its inner stairways and floors built on different levels.

"Can we go inside?" he asked Joel.

"No, sir. The house is kep' locked. But Mr. Warren-ger has the key. He'll give you a look in to-morrow if you want. Hadn't we better be goin' now? That mile is right rough walkin'."

"Just a look around to the back—then I'll go," said Radford.

They pushed their way through springy masses of box, along the flagged-walk leading to the back. The house was certainly capricious in form; no less than two wings sprang from the main building, forming court-yards with ivied walls.

## THE GHOST GARDEN 17

Radford merely glanced at these as he passed, but after looking at the somewhat austere back, with its big arched doorway and low pediment, he retraced his steps and entered one of the courtyards.

There was a carved stone basin in the centre, and a niche in one of the walls held the stone figure of a piping Faun. The inner wall was blank. In the third there were five windows, two round and small, set high, three like all the rest. Under these last, ran a stone seat, carved like the basin of the empty fountain. The sills were low. Kneeling on the bench one could have leaned easily and talked to another in the room beyond. A sensation of having so leaned, and talked—often—swept over Radford.

"It's cuyous," remarked Joel in his soft drawl, watching the young man as he stood with eyes fixed on the ivy-grown shutters. "It cert'ny is cuyous yo' pitching on that room."

Radford started, jarred from his dream by the plain, everyday voice.

"Why?" he said.

"Because *that's* the Spinning-room—the room that's haunted."

"The Spinning-room?"

"Yes, sir. They say Miss Melany Horsemanden was a prime spinner. She did it for her pleasure, of co'se. But they do say as how enduring of the War against England, she carded the wool, and dyed it and spun and



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knitted it into a fine suit for her father, he not being able to get his clothing from England as were his habit. That was the room she did her spinning in. Her wheel's there yet, they say."

A skein of cloud had drifted across the moon. The stillness was as intense as polar cold. Suddenly a strange, minor humming rose through the taut silence—a strange scale of sound rising and falling, after a pause repeating itself, then pausing and again repeating itself.

"The wind's rising," said Radford, with a shiver that he could not control.

Joel drew a step nearer.

"That ain't no wind," said he.

His eyes were on Radford's, and they were no longer pale, but quite dark, with pupils spread like a dog's when he hears a strange step in the house at night. The low, minor hum, rising then dying away, came again—a pause—then again.

Joel grasped Radford's arm with heavy fingers. His dilated eyes held him, not with fear, but with a sort of warning, a be-on-your-guard look in them.

"That ain't no wind," he repeated. "*That's the hum of a spinning-wheel.*"

Again the sound came, then the pause. Joel's face had a rapt look. He spoke in an even, expressionless tone. The humming chord began softly.

## THE GHOST GARDEN 19

"Now's she's drawing out the thread. . . ." The humming rose and fell. "Now she's twisting it. . . ." The pause. "Now she's reeling it back on the bobbin. . . ."

The droning sound swelled louder now, almost angrily. The countryman's face grew fanatically wild.

"She's spinning snares for men's souls. In the Name of the Lord let us be gone from here."

He turned, dragging the young man with him and made for the iron gates at a pace that was just short of a frank run. They were some yards from the house before Radford succeeded in freeing his arm. He felt an ignoble, if natural desire to punch the countryman's shaggy head, but this head towered to a considerable height above him, and was moreover attached to a singularly powerful body, whereas Radford's five-foot-ten was slight, though well knit.

He contented himself with demanding in angry scorn:

"Why the devil did you act like that? I thought you said you weren't afraid of ghosts?"

Joel went through the gates of "Her Wish" and clanged them behind him before answering.

"So I ain't," he said, wiping his drenched face first on one sleeve then on the other. "Not of or'nary ghosses. . . . That one give me a feeling I never thought to have. It were like what the Bible says about her whose feet lead down to Hell. I felt her a-drawin' me.

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I felt like she could draw me in through them closed shutters, like I was water. It give me a dizzy feelin' in my soul."

"Come along," said Radford shortly, repelling a strong desire to go back to "Her Wish" alone. "Mr. Warrenger will be thinking that I've shot you, or you me. That was nothing but the wind in one of those old chimneys."

Joel looked at him with the keenest look he had yet given him.

"Asking you to excuse me," said he, "there ain't been enough wind this evenin' to make that noise, whether in or out of a chimney."

"Oh, come," said Radford impatiently; "let's suppose it *was* Miss Melany Horsemanden's ghost at her spinning-wheel. I really can't think of a more harmless occupation for a ghost."

"Well," retorted Joel, with a politeness that veiled sarcasm, "I cert'ny am glad it didn't make *you* feel like it made *me* feel. I cert'ny am, Mr. Radford."

Radford said nothing. His own soul was rather dizzy too, from what he *had* felt.

### III

**T**HEY spoke little for the rest of the way. As Joel had said, that mile was "long" and certainly rough. Most of it lay through uncut woods that intervened between "Her Wish" and Hilton, the Warrenger estate. After crossing a brook—a "branch," Joel called it—set thick in willows and tangled in loops of wild-grape vine, they came out upon quiet, rolling, pasture lands. A star of orange light appeared and disappeared behind the trees in a wooded hollow.

As they drew nearer and Radford saw that it was shining from the open front-door of Hilton, a vision of the dark and empty hall of "Her Wish" came to him. How long since a lamp had burned there and who had last lighted it?

Nothing could have been more different from "Her Wish" than the house now before him. It was not much larger than a roomy cottage, its shingle roof and snowy paint gleaming gaily in the moonlight, and hospitable smoke uncurling against the pale sky. On either side of the front porch stood big round box-shrubs, and old locust-trees hemmed in the grounds. A dog barked furiously, then lolloped towards them wagging its tail as Joel called it by name. Mr. Warrenger came out to

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the already open door, a tall, spare old man with a shock of white hair, that stood out in a haze against the lamp-light. His voice reached them, full and warm, a voice much younger than himself.

"That you, Carver? I was afraid something had happened. And this is Steve's friend, I suppose, Mr. Radford? How dy'e do, sir. Come in. Come in. Supper's been ready this half-hour."

He went before them through the small, panelled hall, and flung open a door, disclosing a wood-fire and a room cheery with faded chintz and old mahogany, but turned before following them in, and called up the low stairway:

"Melany! . . . They're here! Tell Cynthy to begin on the waffles!"

Melany! . . . The name fell sharp on Radford as if called from another world. Melany! . . . Who was *this* Melany? He had never even heard of the name until to-day. Now twice he had heard it, once as belonging to the dead, once to the living. His mind gave a queer swing—giddily. What was the connection between the two? Or was there any connection? Was it merely a coincidence? Was Melany, perhaps, only a favourite woman's name in this part of Virginia?

"My daughter Melany," said Mr. Warrenger, rejoining them and closing the door, "is a rather anxious housekeeper." He smiled. "It doesn't come naturally to her. She has been worrying about those waffles."

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Waffles and Melany! . . . It had a prosaic, steady quality. One Melany lay under the wild, white grass in her deserted rose-garden, the other Melany was "careful and troubled" about waffles!

Mr. Warrenger had gone into the next room, and now returned, walking gingerly, a brimming glass of mint-julep in each hand.

"My daughter Melany made these herself," said he, and pride was in his tone. "It's a lost art now-a-days, but I've passed it on to her. Let me offer you," he wound up, to Radford, "a goblet fit for the gods."

Radford, who as a rule enjoyed alcohol as little as he did killing things, drank the aromatic concoction to the last drop. He did not realise until the drink was offered him how much he felt the need of it. Something had shaken him to the deepest point of being. "It takes one out of one's self," is a common expression inferring a pleasurable experience. He had been taken out of himself. The dark fascination of the feeling was with him still—but he did not think of it as pleasurable—or, did he? He set down the empty glass, irritated against himself. All his attempts at self-analysis ended in a question. This was not the usual way in which his mind worked. His tendency was, if anything, to be too cocksure about his convictions and emotions, rather than not sure enough. That feeling of having passed a boundary of Fate when he entered the gates of "Her Wish" came back upon him.

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He roused from his abstraction to find Mr. Warrenger urging Joel to stay to sup with them at Hilton, and Joel insisting that a friend of his, Wat Bruce, was "looking to see him sure, and had a 'possum and sweet potatoes waitin' for him that minute."

Joel gained his point and went out, saying that he'd be round again for Mr. Radford by nine o'clock next morning. "A fine fellow . . . a fine specimen of our mountain men," Mr. Warrenger said to Radford, as the door closed on Joel. "But shy—mighty shy . . . shy as that 'possum he's going to eat. It would have given him real discomfort to sit down to supper with us. Yet, in Virginia, men who go out hunting together lunch and sup together, no matter what the difference in class."

He caught himself up and changed the subject: there was a vagueness in Radford's politely attentive look. He thought that his guest was probably too hungry to be interested in anything but food just then. "My daughter will be down directly," he said. "Then we will go in to supper. You are an artist, Steve tells me?"

"Yes—a painter," assented Radford.

"I too . . ." said Mr. Warrenger; and, smiling his warm kindly smile, he waved a hand towards the walls of the little room. They were covered with pale, romantic water-colours in the Mid-Victorian style.

"Ah!" said Radford. "Those are yours?" He went closer and looked at the sketches, one by one. It moved him with the pathetic waste of things, that this charming

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old gentleman should have spent long years in producing painstakingly what was of no worth.

"They're most interesting . . ." he murmured civilly.

"No—I have not succeeded . . . but I have enjoyed," the old man replied with gentle dignity. "Both music and painting. My daughter Melany drew her artistic gifts from me—but hers were far greater, as the river is greater than its source." And he sighed, his face clouding.

"Why do you say they '*were*'?" asked Radford impulsively.

"Because," answered Mr. Warrenger, "my daughter's greatest gift was a wonderful voice—and she lost it."

Radford turned pale. A wonderful voice that she had lost! . . . In his imagination the woman that he had not seen became worthy of her name. As the ghost of that other Melany haunted "*Her Wish*"—so the ghost of her wonderful voice must haunt this Melany. The pallor of his look, and the unfeigned distress in it, struck to the old man's heart. From that moment he liked Radford dearly. A quick thought leaped in his romantic fancy: "I should like my Melany to marry a man like this."

The door opened without a sound, and Melany Warrenger came in. She was very slight, not very tall, and her small bronze-bright head was set high on a long throat. What struck Radford first of all about her was the whiteness of her forehead and the way that her hair



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sprang back from a deep point in the middle. For the rest, her eyes were dark and veiled under eyebrows that had a tragic arch. Her lips, delicate yet full, seemed to close too firmly one upon the other for so young a woman. They were closed, Radford told himself, as though sealing the silence of that wonderful voice that had been given to her and then hushed.

She smiled, however, when her father introduced Radford to her, and gave him her hand—the loveliest hand that he had ever seen. But her eyes did not smile with her lips. Then she spoke, and her speaking voice was slightly husky but delicious. . . . low and delicious. And at the same time that he thrilled to this exquisite quality of her voice, Radford had a nervous impulse to laugh out at her words, for what she said was:

“The waffles are ready, Father.”

What she might have said that would have been in keeping with his impression of her, he could not supply. But he wished that the first words uttered in what was left of the “wonderful voice” had been words that he could have remembered as being fitly set to its low music. And she spoke only once again during supper. It was when her father, who had been talking eagerly with Radford about painting and his life as a painter in France and Italy and England, turned suddenly to her and said:

“You look pale, daughter. And you are eating nothing? Do you feel poorly?”

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She had lifted her veiled eyes, and in her veiled voice answered quietly:

"No, Father. Only a little tired. The wind was from the southwest last night, and I can't sleep when the wind is from the southwest."

Instantly Radford imagined the soft, wild wind blowing straight over the lonely grave in the garden at "Her Wish" to the bed of this living Melany. That was the quarter from which the southwest wind would blow. As he gazed at her thinking this, the veiled eyes turned to his and—the veil lifted for an instant. Her look quickened on his, and in it was surprise, and questioning and a faint trouble. Then she turned it from him to the moonlit evergreens outside the window.

A few moments later, when they were again in the other room, something impelled Radford to say:

"I saw that lovely old deserted place 'Her Wish' by moonlight. No wonder people think it haunted."

He spoke to Mr. Warrenger, but what he said was meant for Melany. Somehow he felt beforehand that his words would bring to her just that slight tremor, as of a flame in the sudden opening of a door. She looked at him again, and now her lips parted; but she said nothing, only sat quite still, looking at him above those rather pale, but beautifully carven, parted lips.

Mr. Warrenger smiled, an indulgent, paternal smile for the credulous superstition of a child-li'e world.

"It is haunted—by beauty," he said charmingly.

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"We love the old place, Melany and I; indeed, she has what might be called an adoration for it. It is in the blood, I suppose; and then, too, names have a certain magic in them, I believe. You see, not only was her grandmother a Horsemanden, but we, her mother and I, named her Melany Horsemanden—after that beautiful, unfortunate creature who lies buried among her own roses."

"Why do you call her unfortunate?" asked Radford, and though he did not turn his eyes on the girl, he saw her bosom rise and fall with a quick breath, then lie still as if she were now withholding the breath that had troubled it.

"I call her unfortunate," said Mr. Warrenger, with quaint and stately deliberation, "because though she was beautiful and gifted, she was also wilful, and selfish and very cruel. She roused a great love in a great heart, and then tortured it—if not to death—at least to silence."

The living Melany here spoke:

"Yes, she is cruel," came from her pale lips, with a sort of still bitterness in its tone of quiet affirmation.

"She is . . . you say?" Radford heard himself asking; and the girl made him the strangest answer:

"The cruel never die."

#### IV.

**M**R. WARRENGER smiled again, at the young man's look of impressed arrestment.

"You mustn't do *my* Melany the injustice of thinking that she believes her poor ancestress to survive in the lurid guise of an ordinary spectre," said he. "What she means, I am sure, is that there are certain personalities so strong that their influence is felt, even after death, in the places where they have lived out their lives. Have I interpreted you rightly, my daughter?"

The girl returned his questioning look with grave eyes, over which the veil had again fallen. She hesitated a moment, then said vaguely:

"It's hard to put certain feelings into words, Father—but I dare say you're right."

"I believe I am," assented the old man. "Just such feelings have come over me in old castles and palaces abroad—places famous for revenge and murder. . . . Cruelty does survive its perpetrators like a dark presence."

"Would it be indiscreet—" began Radford, then broke off.

"Indiscreet to ask for the story of the Melany of 'Her Wish'?" Mr. Warrenger finished for him, with a

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pleasant quizzical look. "Not in the least, my dear sir. But it is a romance lacking in all outward adventure—a mere record of the wanton waywardness of a darkly wilful spirit."

The night had grown chill, and as they sat close around the hearth, the reflection of the flames shone in the unshuttered window-panes against the pale, moonlit lawn and fields without. It was as if the fiery spirit of the dead woman were symbolised by that bright leap of flame at the quiet window. A sudden soberness seemed to fall upon Mr. Warrenger, as he leaned in his big half-way-house chair, his eyes on the spectral flame against the moonlight.

"Tragedy is always a more tragic thing when it is brought upon oneself by one's own act," he said as if thinking aloud. "From all I can gather, the Melany Horsemanden of my story was a most beautiful and gifted being, one on whom nature and circumstance had showered every good thing of life." He turned his eyes on Radford. "There is an old painting of her still at 'Her Wish'—not of any great value in itself—but interesting—most interesting. You have seen portraits that struck you as being vivid likenesses, though not well painted, have you not?"

"Yes. I know what you mean," Radford assented.

"She must have been very beautiful—strangely beautiful," mused the old man. "She must have blazed among the other beauties of her time, like a cardinal-bird

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among its less brilliant kind. In this portrait her hair is red as sumach (she would never 'wear powder') and her eyes sloe-black. It seems as if her very colouring had been wilful like her nature. . . ."

He sat erect suddenly, and seemed to shake off his musing mood.

"Well," he said in a crisper tone, "you shall hear her story. She was the only child of old Airlie Horsemanden, a famous soldier and statesman, and gallant in his day. Yes . . . she came by her waywardness directly, and not from the distaff side. Her mother, it seems, was a sweet, docile creature, who died at her birth, and it is said that when she was three years old, Airlie Horsemanden was no longer his own master. The snip of a witch ruled him with a rod of iron wreathed in roses—she was always mad about roses, it seems—damask roses in particular. She lies now among their roots in her own garden. Strange that she should choose for her burial place the spot that she had made for her pleasure. . . . But she was a strange being. . . ." He checked his gentle moralisings and resumed:

"Yes. When she was three years old her reign had begun. It began with her own father and ended—but I am anticipating. When she was five, she gave herself the name that is now carved on her gravestone. It seems that her father had loved her mother so well that he neglected the child for some years after his wife's death. Even to the point of omitting to choose a Christian name

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for her, and to have her given the rite of Christian baptism. When finally he decided to call her 'Charlotte' after his own mother, the mite announced to him. . . . But perhaps you might like to hear his own account of this curious incident?" Mr. Warrenger broke off, to inquire of Radford.

"There is a letter there in my desk, from him to his brother Henry, relating the matter, with a sort of gleeful pride in it, God knows why! It is quaintly told, however, and might amuse you."

"I should like tremendously to hear it," said Radford; and as Mr. Warrenger returned to his chair with the yellowed paper, the young man gazing at it was conscious of a queer thrill. It was as if in that squarely folded sheet of time-stained paper, with its wafer of black wax, he was looking on the visible link that connected the vivid image of the dead woman, already created in his mind, with the living present. Wilful sprite that she had been, might she not have sat on her father's knee as he wrote of her, and touched with small, imperious fingers that very paper! He had a sudden, lustrous vision of a little form vibrant and already regal with the force of its impassioned will grasping in both hands that ancient letter, and with sloe-black eyes fixed on the writer's face, and rose-red mane tossed back, demanding to hear what had been written there.

Mr. Warrenger was now reading those very words aloud:

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"I must now acquaint you, brother," so the letter ran, "with the name you may use in your prayers when you recommend your only niece to the Grace of the Almighty. You will recall how often, in your brotherly anxiety for my behaviour and the welfare of the child, you have urged upon me the duty of bestowing a name upon her, in accordance with the customs and obligations of a Christian community. Behold, then, the duty achieved, and my little maid the proud possessor of a Christian name. Albeit, I am not so sure, now that I reflect a little, but that you may consider it, if not Pagan, at least something less than Christian. I must therefore tell you without more ado that it is none of my choosing. In a word, brother, my imp hath named herself, and with a decision and firmness worthy of a Columbus naming his new continent! It befell in this wise: Taking the child upon my knee one morning, I informed her of a decision that I had come to overnight. Said I: 'My poppet, you are to be named at last, with all due pomp and ceremony, and the name that I have chosen for you is the name of your dear grandmother—your Dad's mother—'Charlotte.' Brother, will you believe me when I tell you that this tender shoot, this seedling from the tree of my maturity, regarded me with knitted brows and a look of stern dissent? Quoth she: 'I are not Tharlotte—I are—Melany.' Judge of my surprise, who had never before heard this fantastical name! When I was recovered from my first amaze, I made bold to ask Her



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High Mightiness where she had heard the name by which she now called herself? Her reply, I think you will admit, contained more than ordinary of that mysterious quality which I have come to recognise in my brief career of father, as informing the broken speech of babes. It was as follows:

“ ‘I do not know where I heard it, but I hear it when I think of ME.’ Whereupon she repeated, with such a royal heightening of her small person as you may picture to yourself: ‘I are Melany—I are *not* Tharlottle. I are Melany Horsemanden.’

“The Powers above alone know where or how the midget came into possession of this most unusual female name. Upon pondering the question I am come to the conclusion that her old English nurse, Joan Grubb, dead these two years, poor soul, must have told it in some nursery song or fable. ’Tis evidently of Grecian origin, and should signify ‘Dark’ or ‘Melancholy.’ A more ill-suited name to my bright-glowing elf, ’twould be hard to think upon. Be that as it may, she hath chosen it, and she shall wear it. So, as I have said earlier, do you, dear brother, petition God to send down His choicest gifts and benison, upon one Melany Horsemanden, whose sweet body hath dwelt five years in this His inexplicable World, but whose soul, I verily believe, intending no blasphemy, was with Him and Wisdom when its foundations were laid.”

There was a “postscriptum” to this letter, which Mr.

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Warrenger also read aloud, as giving another vivid picture of the heroine of his story, in her queer babyhood.

"Knowing your partiality for our young lady, I will jot here her latest whimsy. For the ceremony of her naming she hath demanded of me a 'gown like a rose.' With her *r's* she hath no difficulty, though *ck* and *s* are still beyond her power. She hath, moreover, announced her sovereign distaste for mittens, and required me to furnish her with a pair of white gloves laced with silver, against the same momentous occasion. I have therefore ordered them by her measure, from London. But I misdoubt me they will be bungling fits for her fairy hands—Titania's glove-maker alone could undertake the matter successfully. Truly, brother, the exquisite completeness of those little hands, when she doth lay them upon me, do often spring the lock of my tears. You are smiling, brother, but behind that smile there are also tears, for you remember the lovely hands now hid away from me forever, of which these tiny perfections are the counterparts."

Mr. Warrenger stopped reading, and there was a silence. In that silence Radford seemed to see again before him a little figure, very straight and stately now in a "gown like a rose." And it gazed at him with still, black eyes, as if saying: "Yes, I am beautiful, but I shall be more beautiful still. And my hands will spring the lock of tears in other breasts than my father's."

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"There is on the back of the second sheet," Mr. Warrenger continued, "a tracery that I cannot but think was the first 'measure' of one of the little hands that were to wear the 'white gloves laced with silver.' It really does seem as if it might have belonged to a fairy." And he smiled, looking down at the unfolded letter.

Radford rose and went over to him. In outline on the yellowed paper he saw, as it were, the phantom of a tiny hand. The father must have traced it by the child's hand spread out upon the paper. And that hand, which had afterward grown to be a woman's hand, and was now only a pinch of dust, if even so actual a thing as that, lay there in outline, perfect as its own shadow, and had lain there for over a hundred years.

"It's strange," murmured Radford, "how a little thing like that can make the dead seem alive again. That baby's hand was *there*—that paper was warm with it . . . it 'sprang the lock of tears' in a man's breast . . ."

"Ah—if it had done so only in *one* man's breast—" Mr. Warrenger took it up. And again the small shape in the "gown like a rose" shone out against the background of a century, and gazed at Radford with eyes calm and fateful, the eyes of one born to a dark but sovereign destiny.

All this time the girl in her low chair by the fire-side had not moved or spoken. Radford glanced at her, and saw that she was leaning back, her beautiful hands,

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evidently an inheritance in her family, one over the other, her eyes on the flames. In the immobility of her whole figure, in the still arch of her wide brows and close-folded lips, there was a curious majesty. Young as she was, and he guessed her not to be more than twenty-two or -three, she seemed to him at that moment the embodiment of quiet tragedy. He remembered some great words: "I shall go softly all my days, in the bitterness of my heart." Melany Warrenger must have communed with herself in some such words. They expressed so perfectly her attitude, her quiet silence, her still indifference, as he interpreted it, to all but her one great loss—the hushing of her "wonderful voice." And, at the same time that he took in this impression, he became also conscious that there was about her something rare, something worth one's while to bring out; he felt a sudden strong desire to hear her laugh and make the tragic arch of her brows unbend with gaiety. As he thought this, she stirred and her eyes lifted, turning to him. He spoke on an impulse:

"Does it . . . make you want to hear this tragic story over again?"

She smiled, her brief, rather chill but sweet smile.

"No," she said gently; "it doesn't make me—" she hesitated the fraction of a second, then, with a faint emphasis that suggested other things that it did make her, "*sad . . .*" she ended.

# V

**I**N fact, the story that Mr. Warrenger related when they had again drawn close about the hearth was rather calculated to rouse indignation and a somewhat unwilling admiration, as for a tremendous vital force darkly misguided.

"Melany Horsemanden the First," as Mr. Warrenger called her, with a fond little glance at his daughter which Radford noticed she seemed rather strangely to avoid, had not only been the beauty and "Toast" of her day, but the heroine of several tragedies other than her own. With the fatal affinity that supreme feminine beauty seems to have with blood, no less than three men were said to have killed themselves on her account. Others, failing in their desire to win her, ruined themselves in various ways—some with drink, some gambling away fortunes and estates.

"I don't doubt," Mr. Warrenger charitably interrupted himself at this point in his narrative, "that all this has been much exaggerated, but I'm afraid there is little doubt that young Gavin Lindsay did find his death in a duel fought because of an affront that she confided to him. However, beauty to the extraordinary degree in which she possessed it has a way of making the

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sanest men occasionally act like lunatics—so that those are not the incidents in her life that I most blame her for. No," and he thrust a stern underlip, frowning at the fire, "her worst offence—the thing that stamps her as cruel and ruthless—is the way that she treated the splendid man who loved her as no other had loved her, and—strange to say—whom she loved."

He then went on to tell the name and circumstances of this "splendid man." He was from the North, of English descent like herself, one Geoffrey Branton, the surname having become extinct with him. He was young at the time of his first meeting with Melany Horsemanden—about seven and twenty—and she was then just turned twenty-three, and in the height of her beauty and its power. But already Branton was recognised as a statesman of great promise, and brilliant parts, and a character of noble generosities. To condense a little from Mr. Warrenger, who evidently loved to dilate on the gloomy romance: after they were "betrothed," as they became shortly, there arose a difference between the lovers, and for this reason:

It seemed that the beauty was extravagantly proud of her position and lineage. She had been presented at Court in England; and on good authority (Mr. Warrenger produced His Grace's letter to Colonel Horsemanden, in which he requested his daughter's hand) she might have married the Duke of Treviston, then in the height, also, of his glory. This nobleman, moreover,

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declared baldly in his epistle that he did not, after due consideration, consider it unworthy of his high estate and name to seek what he termed "an alliance" with even the Colonial branch of the house of Horsemanden.

"What an old bounder!" Radford could not refrain from here interpolating, and Mr. Warrenger, pleased with the neat fitting in of his flotsam French, murmured indulgently:

*"Autres temps, autres mœurs."*

If the name of Horsemanden seemed to His Grace of Treviston not too direly beneath him, to Melany Horsemanden it was of stupendous worth and importance. An old great-aunt had prattled once of a Plantagenet as having figured in the dark backward of time among the first progenitors of the family, and thereafter Mistress Melany had had golden sprigs of broom embroidered on her gloves and kerchief. Yes, such was the amazing fact. In the portrait at "Her Wish," there was a gilded sprig, much tarnished by time, ornamenting one of the gloved hands. Her pride of race, confirmed by such an azure blooded personage as His Grace of Treviston, must have swelled beyond all bounds. The Duke's letter to her father had been found in a small ivory box among her belongings. Indeed, it was only her extravagant and headlong love for Geoffrey Branton that had kept her from making that dazzling match.

"And yet," said Mr. Warrenger, fixing his romantic old eyes impressively on Radford's, "extravagant and

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headlong as it was, it did not prevent her from demanding from him—within a month of their marriage—two sacrifices, so preposterous, so appalling, that it is hard to think of their having been imagined by a woman in love, no matter how superhuman her self-love and pride."

He was rewarded by Radford's almost incredulous stare, when these two demands were disclosed. The first was that Branton should give up his own surname and adopt legally the name of Horsemanden. The second seemed a natural consequence of the first. It was that he should sell his estates and houses in the North, and live permanently at "Her Wish," which was entailed upon her and her descendants. Unless he would agree to these demands, she would refuse to become his wife.

"He—refused?" asked Radford.

"He refused," answered Mr. Warrenger. Then he added with a sort of youthful impetuosity quite delightful: "He was a man, and a fine man, not a slave! What else could he have done?"

"Nothing . . . of course," Radford agreed.

"Oh, I assure you," Mr. Warrenger continued, "it was not settled in a day, no, nor in many days. They wrestled over it, those two strong wills wrestled like athletes over it for weeks and months. There is a story in the family that the last scene took place in her rose-garden, and that in his exasperated pain he flung her from him so violently that she stumbled and fell on the very spot where she is now buried. It is said she cried



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out to him: 'You have flung me upon the ground that you scorn and I adore. Here in this earth I will be buried and the body that you love shall mingle with the soil that you despise—for I will die before I marry you!''

The old man declaimed this speech with such dramatic abandon that afterward he looked a little abashed, and explained: "That is the way my grandmother used to repeat that shocking speech. It was almost as if she had heard it from the lips of that beautiful, savage being."

"You mustn't let Father get *too* excited over this story," came the voice of the living Melany from her corner by the fire. "He loves to tell it," she went on with a pretty, maternal smile at the old man; "but if he lets himself go too entirely, he doesn't sleep well afterwards."

Mr. Warrenger smoothed down the soft mane that he had ruffled up in his eagerness, and murmured in some confusion:

"I don't know how it is . . . but strange . . . somehow, that vivid personality gets hold of one. It's almost as if . . . yes, as if she had left vibrations in the air . . . the air round about . . . here." He lifted his hand towards the window in the direction where "Her Wish" lay still and forsaken in the moonlight.

"Father . . ." remonstrated the girl; and fantastic as was the idea, it seemed to Radford that he could tell

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by the tone of her voice that she had turned pale.

"Now, now, my dear," smiled her father, "you must not be too strict with my phantasies—the diversions of old age are few—and this is surely a harmless one."

"Not if it disturbs your rest, dear," she answered; and now her voice, which had risen in warning before, recovered its low tranquillity.

"How," Radford asked him, "did it end?"

"In their parting for life, or, I might say, for death. He was killed in the early days of the Revolution against England. She died when she was thirty-four, 'still beautiful as a maid of seventeen,' Colonel Horsemanden wrote in his Diary."

"And he never married?" Radford said after a pause, almost as if he knew that Geoffrey Branton had not taken another woman to wife.

"No; he never married," said Mr. Warrenger.

"And she?" Radford asked. "How did she live? What was her life like—afterward? I mean—after they parted? Did she never relent? Was she quite . . .?"

"Quite ruthless . . . yes," the other finished in the way he had, when anticipating a question or a word. "How ruthless, I can let you judge for yourself . . ."

He took a few steps towards the old desk from which he had produced the letter of the Duke of Treviston to Colonel Horsemanden.

"Father . . ." remonstrated the low voice again.

"I shall not read it to Mr. Radford, my dear," the old

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gentleman said, docile to her affectionate concern for him. "I am only going to let him see that extraordinary fragment for himself."

This fragment, which he then handed to Radford, was indeed so extraordinary that the young man felt that the imperious dead might very justly resent his having read it. Nevertheless he re-read it a second time before returning it. It was written in a singular, square handwriting in which there was both deliberation and impetuosity, as if the writer had dug her pen into the parchment-like paper, with the slow vehemence of her determination over certain phrases, and had let it skim breathlessly in her hurry to record others. It had erasures and interlinings as of a first draught, and had certainly been crumpled in a moment of petulance, then smoothed out under a more cautious impulse. It was as if the implacable woman had decided, after all, to keep some record of her last message to her unhappy lover. It had been found, Mr. Warrenger explained, among the odds and ends of letters, in one of the many shallow drawers in Mistress Melany's bedroom escritoire. She had died suddenly of a heart trouble that no one suspected, else this recklessly impassioned shred from her fierce spirit would certainly have been destroyed by her, before her death.

"To be placed with such papers as shall be burned," was written across the back. It was the fifth page of what had been evidently a long missive and the first sen-

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tence was only the end of one that had begun on the page before. "... soul and body," it concluded. Then came the rest:

"Whereas you write that I know not love, and have never loved you—you know well that you write a lie, Geoffrey Branton. I love you as myself, but myself I love also with a jealous and strong love, which you have not the greatness to comprehend. And as I love myself, so do I love this red soil from which I sprang, and so would I have you love it—to tread upon it hand in hand with me in life, and in death—to mingle with it by my side. What! You call yourself a lover and yet do put your name and your estate above the wish of her you love? Your name is not to you what my name is to me, for my name came to me in mystery, and what the souls of others are to them it is to me. And to me this red earth of my home is dearer, and ever will be dearer, than aught else that ever was created, so that should I find myself upon the golden pavements of Heaven, I would dash my head against them and blaspheme, until God cast me back again upon its breast. Yet is my love for you as great, so that I am in torment. But your love for me is cool and melteth quickly, like a snowflake in your proud wrath. I tell you again as I have oft told you, Geoffrey Branton, that you might as well strive to tear a spirit from its body and fit it with another body, as strive to tear me from the sheath of my name, whereto I was born, and from the soil which bore me. And you

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might repeat to me an hundred thousand times, that your name and lands are as dear to you as mine to me, yet will I never believe you, for it is not love for them, but hateful pride that keeps you from yielding to my wish. Oh, thou ingrate and stiff-necked man! Thou sweet yet poisonous liar—to say I do not love thee! Hearken to me, Geoffrey—read these words till they eat into thy dear and detested eyeballs like fire: so well do I love thee that I would have thee cold in death, ere know thee burning with another love; so fiercely do I love thee that should an hundred years pass away—yea, a thousand—and my ghost be wandering through the empty air, and thy ghost housed in another body, yet would I draw thee to me; yet would I suck up thy sweet, thy hateful life into my own. Beware then, Geoffrey Branton, how thou lovest or livest without me! And now for this life, farewell.”

The feeling with which Radford handed back this amazing letter was distinctly one of awe. That a spirit so long passed away could strike such ringing chords in the breast of the living, overflowed him with the sense of the fevered grewsomeness that might pervade some of the regions lying beyond the light of everyday. The poetry of poets long dead had this power, yes. But it was the power of art; this silent outburst that had so stirred him was only the echo of a private passion—a strange wild passion that had died long ago, with the

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woman who experienced it. There was no art of literature in that letter; only the explosive, unruled force of a lawless personality, dashing itself in a paroxysm of futile rage against the barrier itself had raised; wounding itself and what it loved with an unswerving ferocity of purpose.

However, at the same time that he vibrated to its influence, he had a clear perception of that very letter as being the probable source of the legends about the ghost garden, and the haunting of "Her Wish." And as this thought came to him, Melany Warrenger rose from her chair in the shadow of the chimney, and drew near them. Radford was not sorry when she said that she had come to take her father off to bed. He felt there was no word the old gentleman could have added to the story of Melany Horsemanden that would not have marred the effect of her astounding, her almost incredible letter.

## VI

**W**HEN Joel Carver came by the next morning to take Radford back to Evergreen, Steven Campbell's place, the old gentleman would not hear of it. Since Steve had to be in Washington for at least ten days, what more natural, more delightful, Mr. Warren-ger put it, in his charmingly cordial way, than that Steve's friend should spend that time at Hilton? He added that if the young man could realise the pleasure he would give two lonely people by doing so, he would surely not refuse. This decided Radford, who was really longing to stay, and Joel went off alone, charged with directions for the young man's servant, who was to send over such of his belongings as he would need during his visit.

The day was soft, pale, and fragrant as one of the late autumn roses blooming by the front door. From the south lawn, where the three strolled bareheaded after breakfast, could be seen the crown of trees that marked the crest of "Her Wish." Radford said again how beautiful he thought it, and how much he would like to see it by daylight.

"Nothing easier," said Mr. Warren-ger. "I have an engagement with my attorney at ten, but Melany can

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take you over. I will give her the key, so that she can show you the house as well, and I will join you as soon as I am at leisure."

It seemed to Radford as if the girl were about to protest. Her lips parted, but she closed them again without speaking, and went silently to get the key and fetch a hat for their walk across the fields. The day was indeed like summer in its warmth, though the autumn foliage, blurred and tempered by a dim blue haze, lent it a subtle poetry, a vague magic that summer lacks. And this wistful charm of a loveliness flowering on the edge of winter was repeated in the girl walking at his side. She was far more lovely by daylight than she had seemed by lamplight. Her skin, pale and pure, had the most winning surprises of sudden colour.

"Tell me," said Radford impulsively, "you don't mind taking me to 'Her Wish,' do you?"

"No," she answered. "Why should I mind? I love it."

"But I thought perhaps . . . a stranger . . ." Radford suggested.

"You see," Melany replied, looking at him with one of her quiet, detached smiles, "you are not quite a stranger. Steve has talked of you . . . often . . . when you were still abroad."

And suddenly Radford remembered that Steve had also talked of her, only her name had slipped his memory. This, then, was the girl who two years before had set all



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Paris agog with her marvellous voice. "The daughter of a neighbour of mine in Virginia," Steve had said. But then, he had not mentioned afterward that she had lost her voice. Suddenly he found the only possible explanation. Steve loved her, and could not bring himself to speak of the tragedy that had overtaken her. And he understood now the reason of her father's casual allusion to it. In his simplicity the old man had spoken of it as of some public calamity. He said without any apparent pause before his words:

"And he has talked to me of you."

The sudden gush and ebb of colour in her face was startling. Then she said tonelessly:

"Yes. He believed in my future."

Radford felt in an inner whirl, between his anxiety not to be intrusive, and his desire to say some word of fellow-feeling to a creature hurt in her dearest fibres as this girl had been hurt.

She exclaimed before he could speak, with swift divination:

"Don't, please . . . but I thank you as much as if you'd said it." Her head lifted itself a little more lightly on the long throat, and she walked a little faster. There was in this lifting of her head and quickened pace a singular nobility. He repelled the rush of pity that assailed him, as something she would have splendidly resented.

They had by now reached the vine-looped stream at

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the foot of the pasture lands, and in helping her across, he had a feeling as if he were also helping her across the flow of her bitter memories on to a surer footing.

"I forgot to ask your father this morning something that I wondered over a good deal last night," he said, as they went on through the woods beyond. "It was about 'Her Wish' . . . how it happened to go out of the family!"

"It went by entail to Henry Horsemanden—her uncle, you'll remember—and my great-great-grandfather. Then to his son, and so on, till thirty years ago, when the last heir sold it to a rich man from Brooklyn."

"A rich man from Brooklyn!" Radford echoed her. "What would your proud Melany have thought of that? And why aren't the Brooklyn person's children living there?"

"He sold it again," she answered. "It has been sold several times since then."

"And now?" asked Radford.

"Now it is for sale again . . . has been for twelve years."

"Is it because . . .?" He hesitated. "They think . . . they really imagine . . .?"

"All of them have said so," she admitted evasively. "None of the people who bought it lived a whole year in it."

Radford looked at her intently for a second or two, then he brought it out bluntly:

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"What do *you* think?"

"I?" Her colour welled, then ebbed.

"Yes, you," the young man insisted.

"About what?"

"About 'Her Wish.'"

"Do you mean . . . ?"

"Yes," he said again.

She was silent for at least a minute; then she turned her face full on him, and it was very pale.

"Before I answer," she said, "I want to ask *you* something. . . . Do you believe in . . . such things . . . I mean at all . . . even a little—or do you laugh at them?"

"No," replied Radford. "I certainly do not laugh at them. As for believing . . ." again he put it bluntly . . . "in ghosts, do you mean?"

The girl was gazing at him with a breathless look, as if something vital to her depended on his ultimate, full answer.

"Presences . . . influences . . . something . . ." She stopped, her brows knitting while her eyes remained fixed on his, seeking the exact expression for her meaning. "Something that is *alive* . . . though one can't see it," she brought out finally.

He didn't keep her waiting. "Yes. And more than that," he said. "When I was a little chap, I saw a . . . well, yes, it was a ghost." He smiled. "The ghost of a dog—a little white woolly dog, like a toy."

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"The ghost of a dog!"

She still gazed at him, but her delicate, tragic eyebrows flickered as though one to whom she had given a rare confidence had permitted himself to mock at her. Radford understood in a flash.

"No. You mustn't think I'm joking," he assured her. "It is quite true. I was rather a forlorn little chap, left to the care of an old great-aunt, hard as nails. She didn't approve of playmates for children, human or otherwise. My wild, my delirious dream of joy was to have a little dog, all my own. Something warm that I could hug and take to bed with me in the horrid dark. . . . Well, just as I told you, one day when I was trying to play with my small, lone self . . . it was in a far corner of the old garden, as far as I could get from my aunt. . . . I looked up, and there was the dog of my dreams! I could never get quite close to it . . . but it came several times . . . while that garden was my playground, and circled about me . . . I was only five years old. It never occurred to me till long afterward that it had any connection with a little grave-stone in that same garden, on which was carved, 'In memory of Flash, dearest and faithfulest of dogs and friends.' Years afterward I came across a photograph of my mother with this same little dog in her arms. Why my mother couldn't come to me, and her little dog could, is . . . well, one of the eternal, ironical mysteries."

He drew out this quaint anecdote for the sheer pleas-

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ure of watching the play of varying emotions that it caused on the sensitive face before him.

"Oh," she breathed when he had ended, "I do think that is the most pathetic thing I ever heard! . . . But beautiful . . ." She turned away her eyes a moment, then looking back at him said: "If you saw that—perhaps . . ." She turned away again, and began walking forward.

"Perhaps what?" urged Radford.

"Nothing—just a half-formed thought . . ." she said, keeping her profile towards him.

"If I guess it, will you tell me?" he persisted.

"It was nothing," repeated Melany.

"Was it that perhaps as I had once seen something—well, not strictly speaking *real*—I might see . . . at 'Her Wish' . . . something of the same sort?"

Her faced turned now with a look of real pain on it—apprehension—almost fear.

"Oh, don't speak of it—please," she said.

"But why? We've just been speaking of such things."

"I know, but . . . I can't explain. It's only a feeling I have about—about— No, I can't explain," she wound up on a more decided note.

"You think your ancestress might resent my intrusion? Especially as I am from the North, as Geoffrey Branton was?" he smiled, trying to rally her.

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Melany murmured something in her lowest, most husky voice. He could just make it out by bending nearer.

"She *does* resent intrusion . . ."

He stood erect sharply, and stopped short in his turn.

"You don't mean that she resents *you*?" he cried with a sort of queer indignation.

Melany laughed and there was a suggestion of nervous tears behind her laughter.

"Why not *me*, please?" she asked with a visible effort to carry it off lightly. "Haven't I intruded on her proudest right? . . . Haven't I dared to take the thing she counted more precious even than love?" Her voice was becoming deep and earnest in spite of her attempt to keep it bantering. "Haven't I," she ended, fixing him with her dark eyes, "taken her name?"

Impressed by her manner, but not showing it, Radford answered in matter-of-fact tones:

"No, you haven't taken it; it was given to you."

"It was given to me, yes, but I've taken it all the same. I accept it. I wear it. I am called by it. I, too, am Melany Horsemanden . . ." She shivered. "And *she* would not forgive that offence. I am sure of it." She had cast aside now all pretence of lightness, and fixed him again with her sombre, haunted-looking eyes . . . (Haunted! he had the word for them at last.)

"*I know it . . .*" she added in a whisper that underscored the assertion.

## VII

**R**ADFORD was intensely aware of the delicate uniqueness of the situation. Something about him had drawn this unusual girl into a partial, almost unwilling confidence that he felt sure was rare with her, and his whole thought was bent on how to meet her with the exact measure of comprehension; how to take her with just seriousness enough to make her feel that her instinct had not been mistaken, and yet not so seriously as to let her think she had revealed too much of what evidently, as a rule, she kept so jealously to herself. He said at last quite simply:

"I understand, I think. From what I have gathered of her character, I feel as you do."

"As I do?" She seemed to hold in her breath on the words.

"That she would not have forgiven," he explained.

He felt, rather than heard, the tense breath released little by little. Then she said, looking not at him now, but before her at the fine network of the woods:

"It must take a sort of genius to be relentless."

"Yes. There was that sort of genius in the sixteenth century."

"Oh . . ." Her voice had a dissenting note. "The

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thing I mean isn't of any particular century. It's a question of personality."

"Exactly; there were many such personalities in the Cinque-cento."

"Many? How terrible!"

"Terrible but wonderful," Radford ventured to qualify.

"Terrible but wonderful. . . ." she repeated slowly, as if fitting the words to some image in her mind. "Terrible but wonderful. . . ." she said again.

Her tone put before him, as if painted against the hazy background, a vivid picture of the fierce, bright Melany of "Her Wish," a picture whose black eyes, steadily malevolent, were focussed upon the living Melany's pale, brooding face.

"It must interfere with your pleasure in the old place, to feel that personality so keenly," he said, wishing to let her see that he had not taken too much for granted.

"'Interfere'?" she echoed; then on a dropped tone: "Yes, it does rather . . . interfere. I mean," she interpreted herself quickly, "that one feels an influence, as if . . . well, as if one weren't wanted."

"Don't you think a lot of it may be just what has been handed down about her? The tradition and that letter?"

"Of course that's part of it," she admitted.

"But you feel there's . . . more?"

He was afraid he had ventured a shade too far, for



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she didn't answer at once. Then, to his surprise, she said quietly:

"Much more."

A revelation came to Radford at that, of the imperative need urging her to share these impressions. He felt as if he had arrived only in the nick of time to keep the tension of her secret mind from snapping with silence. And the sure intuition that had told her his hidden mind would comprehend, drew him closer to her. He measured his words carefully this time.

"You feel it's not only *an* influence, but *her* influence?" he asked.

"I want to see what *you* will feel in that house," she countered.

Radford thought that the best way now was to come forward with a confession of his own.

They had turned into the long avenue of fir-trees that led to "Her Wish" gates. He could just see the chimneys of the house and a bit of the dark hedges, which even in the sunlight struck him afresh as a fateful boundary. His heart quickened as it had done the evening before, with the feeling of mysterious recognition.

He told her of it, keeping back his fancy about the scent of damask roses near the grave, and that strange humming chord, which he still believed to have been the effect of some draught in one of the chimneys.

"Yes," she said, "I know. What is it, I wonder? Have we lived before, and remember, do you think? Or

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do we—slip out—in our sleep, and make strange journeyings!”

“Both perhaps,” said Radford.

She just raised her eyes to his, then looked again at the gates they were approaching.

“Was it a—pleasant feeling?” she then asked.

“Not pleasant exactly, more excited—*exalté*. It made me curious to know if anything was to come—afterward. Whether it . . .” He was puzzled to express just what his feeling had been. . . . “Whether it meant anything, you know,” he ended rather baldly. “It seemed like a queer sort of riddle. . . . I felt there *was* a meaning but that it was, well, ‘up to me’ to find it.”

They had reached the gates now, and the girl stood gazing through the iron flower-work and tendrils at the dreamy house.

“Perhaps,” she said, “you’ll find it . . . there.” Her voice shook suddenly. “Oh, I pray you will!” she cried, and her hands went to her breast, and in her eyes that sought his with supplication there were tears. Radford spoke with a tenderness as frank as her appeal.

“Why do you pray that?” he asked.

“Because,” she answered, her eyes never leaving his, “because I believe you were sent here—to help me.”

“If I can, you may be sure I shall,” said the young

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“Oh, you can! You will—I feel it,” she said, even more fervently.

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"Against . . . that influence?"

"Against *her* influence!" cried the girl, at last wholly unveiling her inner self to him with mystic passion.

Radford was as amazed and thrilled as if some supernally shy, fugitive being, a wood-nymph say, fleeing from panic danger, had appeared before him in appeal. This, then, was the meaning of that look in her veiled eyes. Her wound was crueller than mere loss could make it, had been dealt, in her belief, by a weapon not only sharp but poisoned. It was strange how certain he felt, in that instant of revelation, that she believed the loss of her voice to be the dreadful result of the influence she had defined for him in her cry of surrender.

"I won't fail you," he said; "I'll never fail your beautiful belief in me."

Now her words rushed eagerly, stammeringly.

"I knew it. I knew *you*—almost at once. I didn't talk last evening because I was feeling you . . . trying to make out whether it was only my fancy . . . or . . ." her smile was quite lovely, "whether you were what I thought you. . . . I couldn't tell you this. . . . I couldn't have told you anything . . . but for what you told me . . . just now in the woods. That little dog . . . Oh!" she broke off, and her breast struggled against nervous laughter . . . "Think what that quaint little ghost did . . . it showed you to me as you are . . . it broke the seal . . . the awful seal I've had to set . . ." She could not finish but laid her hand on her lips, telling him with-

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out words where that seal, broken now for him, had been so tragically set. At the same time, she held out her other hand to him. It was an extraordinarily beautiful gesture, full of the implicit trust that a child sometimes signifies in giving its hand.

Radford took it gently, and bent over it, moved to the quick of a nature as sensitive as her own.

"I will not fail you," he repeated as he touched his lips to it. He felt as if with that kiss he were signing his fealty to a gentle, exiled princess. "Exiled"—again he had found just the right word. That was what so exactly she seemed to him, a creature exiled from the joy that was surely her right, if beauty and sweetness did give rights in this queer world, as he had always, rather ardently, believed.

They remained silent for a few moments, she trying to control some of the curious ecstasy that had mounted in her with the breaking forth of that sealed inner fountain; he searching for words that would not seem too abrupt or commonplace to link them to the next phase of their very real, yet exquisitely fragile, relationship.

He expressed finally what just then he wished most.

"Shall we sit there, under that fir, and talk together a while before we go in?" he suggested, pointing to an aged fir-tree, with foliage that lay in silverish-green clouds upon its gnarled branches, above a carpet of fragrant brown.

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"Yes," she said; "I should like that so much." And her sigh was one of content, as if he had given her by his suggestion what she, too, just then most wanted.

She took off her hat, when they were settled upon the brown fir-needles, and leaning back her head against the tree, closed her eyes as if it soothed her to feel its sunny, aromatic breath playing over her loosened hair. Her face, with its closed eyes, had a sweet, exhausted look that went to Radford's heart, plucked at its finest strings. The pure fragrance, aromatic yet chaste, was like the fragrance of her personality. And there was something, too, in the trustfulness of those closed eyes, that touched him, as the confidence of birds touched him. Ever since he could remember birds had seemed to him the most magical, the most endearing of living things, and their trust in man the most moving of miracles.

She opened her eyes, and meeting his, smiled gently.

"I am tired," she said. "We have come a long way—far longer than from 'Hilton' to 'Her Wish.'"

"Yes, a long way, but a very beautiful way."

"And I burned all the bridges, did I not? With a vengeance!"

She gave this a rueful quaintness, and her colour flickered.

"It was a glorious conflagration," smiled Radford, glad that she could give things this natural, half-jesting turn. He knew what it must have cost her to break that

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seal of silence. "Some bridges are only built to be burnt."

"Well . . ." and she sighed, "mine are certainly in ashes."

"There's a better way back," he ventured, "and you won't need bridges."

"Back?" she echoed quickly.

"Back to the serene, bright place where you belong—that I am to help you reach again."

Her face took on its tragic pallor.

"Serene, yes, perhaps . . . but not bright . . . never bright any more."

He knew so well how she was hearing the echo of her hushed voice.

"Ah, but there is brightness and brightness," he said, holding her with his young, kind eyes. "We are not to walk by one star only . . ."

"Yes, yes we are!" she caught it from him with passionate vehemence. "The star of our greatest gift. . . . *That* lights us. . . . *That* draws us on. . . . When that goes out . . . we grope . . . we stumble. . . . All the other stars in Heaven . . . in *our* Heaven . . . are only pale freckles against the darkness. . . . The dreadful darkness. . . . Their rays don't reach our path . . . don't light our way. . . ."

He couldn't answer this cry of desolation with a phrase. He sat in silence looking down at the play of shadows, fine as the brush-strokes in a Japanese drawing,

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that made a pattern over her white gown, and the slender hand she had clenched in its folds. Her face was turned away from him.

She broke this silence herself, speaking in the soft, husky tone that always followed her outbursts of emotion:

"Would you care," she asked, "to hear how it began?"

"Ah, but you know I would."

She accepted this with a simplicity that he was beginning to recognize as one of her chief rarenesses.

"It began," she said without waiting for further protest on his part, "when I was a child. . . . I think—" her fine brows puzzled over it for a second, "that I was about twelve."

Radford's heart jumped. This "it" then, was not only the tragedy of her voice. She was going to tell him about that other thing also.

"Yes," she went on, "I am sure I couldn't have been more than twelve. I was there . . ." she looked towards the iron gates . . . "in the house. That portrait—the one Father spoke of last night—always had an intense fascination for me. I stood looking up at it that day, until the eyes seemed to move on mine, and all at once . . . something chill and dreadful rushed through me. . . . I don't know how to describe it to you. It was as if the invisible part of me—soul—spirit—what you will . . . the essence of me, was being shaken . . .

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rocked to and fro . . . loosened from my body. I ran, and ran, and ran. It was then that the thought first came to me . . .” She stopped, catching in her breath.

“The thought . . . ?” Radford prompted.

“The thought that she hated me for wearing her name. That she would . . . punish me for it. Take, in her turn, something of mine . . .”



## VIII

RADFORD seemed to see the flying figure of a child, the wind in its hair, fear in its darkened eyes, skimming down the terraced lawns towards them. And at the same time he saw also the whole thing—the childhood haunted by a nervous dread that with years had grown into an obsession—*l'idée fixe* that found in the loss of her voice the fulfilment of a dark prescience.

"Did you tell any one of this feeling?" he asked gently.

"No—no one. I've never spoken of it till today. There was no one who would have understood."

"And it never left you . . . ? I mean, you were always conscious of it . . . of a dread?"

"Always. I used to wonder . . ." He saw the hands that she had clasped together, tremble. . . . "if I couldn't do something . . . to propitiate her."

The smile she turned on him was like the piteous effort of a child to be brave in darkness that terrifies it.

"I used to put fresh flowers before her portrait and on her grave . . ." She looked down a moment. "I do it still."

And Radford, glancing again at her clasped hands, re-

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membered his feeling that the fresh flowers upon that grave in the ghost garden must have been laid there by a woman's delicate hands.

"It's the feeling, I suppose," she added with a sad bitterness, "that made the Greeks call the Erinnyes the Eumenides; and still makes the Irish call the fairies they fear so much, the 'good people.' "

Radford did not dare show his pity, but he could not keep back his admiration.

"I never imagined such beautiful courage!" he exclaimed.

"Courage? *Whose* courage?" she asked.

"Why, yours! Yours! . . . To keep such a thing to yourself . . . to live with it all these years and never speak of it . . ."

She flushed again.

"I didn't speak of it because I was *afraid* to speak," she said slowly. "You are the only one I ever knew who wouldn't have thought me mad. Father—Steven—no. I could never have told them such a thing. It's because you know . . . for yourself . . . because you've felt . . . such things . . . that I can speak to you."

Radford replied, his voice shaking a little:

"Tell me how I can help you."

"Ah," she sighed, her eyes turning to him in wistful confidence, "I can't tell you *how*, I can only feel that you *will*."

He hesitated an instant before asking: "You think I

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shall have some power to . . . come between you . . . ?  
To—as one might say—ward her off?”

“To propitiate her,” the girl corrected softly.

“You feel one wouldn’t be strong enough to—well—to dominate her . . . ?”

Melany gave a sort of moan.

“Oh, you don’t dream how terribly strong she is!”

“You really feel it to that extent?” he marvelled.

“As if she were a dark power?”

The girl whispered it:

“She is all Will . . . a relentless, implacable Will!”

“But,” began Radford, and he did not finish his sentence until she said urgently:

“Go on—go on. . . . You may say anything you like—anything.”

“Then—hasn’t she,” the young man’s voice was very low, modulated to the tragic allusion he was about to make, “hasn’t she already . . . satisfied this Will . . . in regard to you?”

She accepted it as the kind cruelty of a surgeon’s knife, without wincing, but her face went white.

“You mean—when she took away my voice . . . ?”

Then, as he nodded, with the most extraordinary mingling of scorn and dread, she replied:

“No! She is the daughter of the Horse Leech—she cries without ceasing, ‘Give! Give!’”

“You think,” murmured Radford, appalled by the

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depth of her obsession, "that she means to take more from you?"

"All—if she can," said Melany. "If you can't help me—all—everything."

Radford knew now, with a leap of his intelligence that had in it no disloyalty to her, that he was in the presence of either a piteous dementia, or one of those psychic mysteries that neither science nor religion has yet succeeded in explaining. Perhaps, he told himself, trying to bring all his rationality to bear on the amazing question, there might even be a mingling of both in the dark fabric—an over-sensitive nature too easily reacting to such an influence, exaggerating the unseen power, that very possibly existed but that had no such evil limitlessness as her dread imagined.

He turned to her, feeling that while they were at this abnormal pitch one screw more to the key governing the taut string would not matter, and that if, as she so touchingly repeated, he was to help her, he must know the full extent to which she had suffered this strange assault.

"Have you ever," he asked, "seen anything?"

But she shook her head.

"Thank God—no," she said fervently. An instant later she added with a slight confusion, as if confessing against her will, but in the effort to be utterly frank with him:

"I thought I *heard* something once though. . . . I felt

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that she was laughing at me, and then suddenly, I seemed to hear a queer, soft laugh—running up a little scale and stopping short—it was more in my mind that I heard it than in the air. . . . It was the way one remembers a bit of music. . . .”

She looked at him anxiously, trying to make out whether he understood. “*I know though,*” she ended, “whether it was with my mind or—or really that I heard it—I know that she was there—and laughing.” All at once she caught his arm in both her slight hands, and with the most heart-breaking desperation, cried to him: “If *you* think me mad, I shall think so too! And then I shall *be* mad!”

Radford took her hands in his and held them firmly. They were wet and cold as ice.

“Listen,” he said, his eyes on hers, “if we are to be good comrades in this business we must trust each other absolutely, we must be absolutely frank with each other. How can you trust me if you think me capable of such wrong ideas about you? And remember this, please—no madman ever yet thought that he *was* mad. If you *were* mad,” and here he ventured to smile at her, “you would be the last person to think so!”

Her eyes closed again for a few seconds, and then gently drawing her hands from his, she whispered:

“You are very good to me, and—very patient. I think you know what I feel.”

“Yes, I think I do,” he said. “And your beautiful

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generosity makes you feel much more than there's any cause for."

"No," she returned, and now she too smiled, though it was rather a wan little effort; "if we are to be good comrades, 'absolutely frank with each other,' you must admit that I couldn't feel too grateful. Why!" and she showed him now the loveliest, illumined look, "you found me wandering alone in a black wilderness—and you held out your hand to me! Since I have taken it," she ended, her voice quivering, "the darkness isn't so dark." And rising quickly, she turned towards the iron-gates.

"Come," she said in another tone, "I long to know what *you* will feel when you are in that house, when you see that portrait."

## IX

THEY passed through the gates and went silently up the faded lawn on their strange adventure. The lovely old house, its walls and columns now quickened with blowing shadows, gave forth no impression of hostility; looked, rather, gently benign in the sunlight. And there was a grace about it, an elusive charm quite feminine, as if in some subtle way it had become permeated by the charm of the woman whose visible thought it was.

On the steps of the low, tessellated portico, Melany turned and handed him the great key.

"I want *you* to unlock the door," she explained in answer to his look of surprise. "I feel as if—it's queer, but I do feel as if she would not mind so much, your doing it."

Radford, his eyes on the huge silver key with its handle roughened by the crest of the Horsemandens, had an odd sensation, as if in holding it he were holding, literally, the key to some portentous mystery. Between him and the mystery were the massive double doors of "Her Wish," under their arch of patterned glass. As he had felt last night, in crossing the line sentinelled by its dark hedges, that he was crossing some boundary of Fate, so it

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now seemed to him that, by turning this key in the lock guarding the mysterious house, he would of his own will become an intruder on what it hid. It was as if a voice within him said: "You will be entering upon this mystery of your own volition, by your own act. Think well. This decision matters—is momentous."

The next moment, with a reaction of mood into something almost exultant, and a faster heart-beat, he stepped forward and thrust home the key into its lock. It turned with the easy click and spring of old hand-wrought English workmanship; and opening one side of the great door, he stooped first, then reaching upwards, drew the bolts that held the other, as if from long habit he knew just where to feel for them. Then he waited for the girl to enter, but she drew back.

"I have a feeling," she explained, "that *you* must enter first."

"Well then . . ." he said, smiling to lighten the solemnity of what she showed so plainly to be for her a most solemn, even dread, occasion,—and as he spoke he stepped across the threshold.

Without, in the sunlight the girl stood quite still, looking at him. Then, for a second she seemed to vanish—a thin, yet dense, curtain seemed to have fallen between them. It was the queerest optical, or mental, illusion, but for that instant he seemed to be quite alone in the beautiful panelled hall—quite alone in an intense silence, that was like sound. The next instant, there she was



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beside him, and the sunlight following her lit up her white dress and crown of spun-bronze, so that she looked a more vivid creature against the dimness than she had looked in the diffused glare outside.

"Well?" she whispered.

"It's adorable," said the young man, peering about him,—“all that I can see of it—perfectly adorable.”

Her voice dropped a little, as if for the first time he had failed to meet her quite comprehendingly.

"I meant . . . that feeling of . . . of . . ." She didn't finish her sentence.

"Of familiarity . . . recognition?" he completed it. "Yes—that's there—but not so strongly as last night. In a way it comes back to me, but vaguely; the way that poetry sometimes comes, you know,—with a line missing here and there—rhymes that one can't fill out. . . . Perhaps," he ended, looking up at the tall, arched windows, "if we could open some of those blinds . . ."

Under her direction, he opened one of the windows and pushed back the Venetian blinds. The light stole in, tempered by the frail, yellow foliage of silver-poplars just outside, and its mellow discretion revealed with exactly the right measure of wistfulness the proportions of the charming arched hall, and the delicate intricacies of its carved cornice.

"Yes," he said, gazing at the closed doors on every side, "it comes back . . . in snatches . . . like an old tune . . ."

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The hall, after its first fine regularity, became whimsical, narrowing here, widening there. Three staircases led from it, the main one, springing with a noble curve to the front of the upper floor, the two others, set far back, leading, as Melany explained, to rear wings. Above short flights of steps, one saw dark corridors winding off to rooms built on another level. The planks of the oak floor, converging in fine perspective lines to the last of the three arches, in which was set a big, double door corresponding to that at the front, had evidently been hewn the entire length of the trees. Yellowish stains on the bare walls showed where portraits had once hung.

He wondered at the lack of dust, and the polish of the planks under their feet, and Melany told him that the people who now owned "Her Wish"—Higgson was the jarring name—"kept it up," to a certain extent, under her father's superintendence, always hoping, by some lucky fluke, to sell it again.

She showed him through the rooms to right and left, rooms that impressed him with a renewed sense of exquisite proportion, then led the way to one of the corridors at the back. Here she stopped, before ascending the three shallow steps that led up to it.

"We're going now . . . to *her* special wing," she said under her breath. "The portrait is in the room they call her breakfast-room; her spinning-room adjoins it."

She looked up at him so pale, in the dim light, that he

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had a sense of seeing her face through the green dimness of water.

"Would you rather not—after all?" he asked, considerate of what must be her shrinking, even while his own heart burned with a romantic curiosity and the desire for a closer contact with the personality who had created this enchanting abode.

But she had recaptured her firmness.

"No," she said; "I want to go with you. Only keep close to me in your thought. Don't let . . ." It was with an effort that she uttered this . . . "Don't let your thoughts be drawn too far away. *That*—I can't tell why—but *that* would make me—afraid—to be there with you."

He held out his hand smiling.

"Come—let's go hand in hand, if you're nervous."

But she did not reflect his mood.

"No," she said seriously. "No. I feel that wouldn't be best."

"Why?" he asked, not at all seeing what she *could* mean.

She did not falter this time. "I feel—since I have been here—" she couldn't keep back a slight shiver—"that she prefers you to see her portrait, alone."

Radford frankly stared.

"You mean you won't come with me?"

"Yes, I'll come with you, but I won't look at it with you. I'll stand by the window while you look at it."

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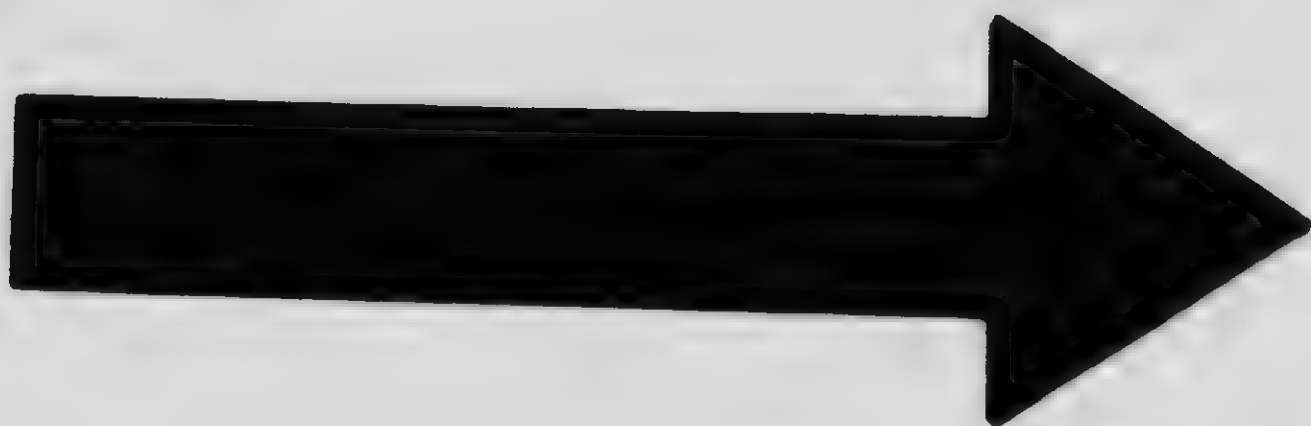
"What an odd idea!" he couldn't help exclaiming.

"Oh," retorted the girl, with one of her sudden out-breaks, "don't stand there talking! Hurry! Let's get it over."

The corridor, long and dimly lighted by two round, green-shuttered windows set high, led along the south-east side of the little court where Radford had stood that first evening. His feelings as he followed the slight figure of the modern Melany were strangely blent of an eagerness to come within sensible perception of that other Melany, and of a desire, that can only be termed chivalrous, to "ward her off" from her terror-ridden kinswoman.

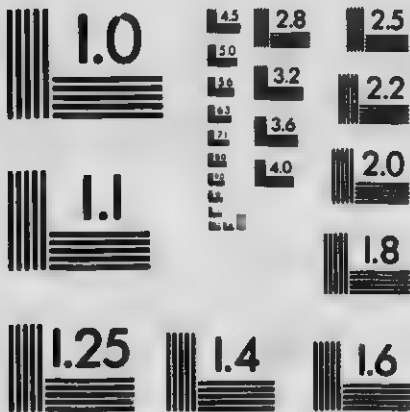
He was as keen over the possible sensations that he might experience in looking at her portrait, in being at last precisely in the middle of her most concentrated influence, as a young scientist noting in himself the progress of some rare disease. It was curious, he reflected, how up to this present time he had shrunk, had even very decidedly recoiled, from any development in himself of possibly latent powers in this direction. Now, just as he had longed to return alone, and listen for a repetition of the eerie humming that Joel had pronounced the hum of a spinning-wheel, he caught himself wishing that he were going to visit these haunted chambers unaccompanied—even by the girl he wished so much to help.

She paused before a door at the end of the corridor, and standing aside, said:



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*"You open it."*

And this time, without any hesitation, with, on the contrary, a perceptible increase of his secret eagerness, he turned the tarnished silver handle and stepped into the room beyond.

The infiltration of greenish light through the closed blinds showed him a vista of open doorways and bare shining floors as in a French palace. The girl, without waiting for him to speak, went swiftly and threw open the shutters of the long window. As she stood there, with her back to him, he could see over her shoulder the stone Faun in his niche among the ivy.

*"It's there before you,"* she said without turning, *"above the mantelpiece."*

There before him! He withdrew his eyes slowly from the little sunlit stone figure; and, with God knows what sensations of being at some crisis of hidden things, lifted them to the wall opposite.

## X

IT was indeed "there before him"—simply the most extraordinary semblance of a woman he had ever seen.

That first prolonged stare of his held no criticism—he was merely taking in the incredible crimson of the hair heaped so overwhelmingly above the low forehead, and the intense malicious sweetness given to the side-long eyes by the almost Chinese lift of their eyelids towards the temples. Then presently, recovering a more dispassionate sense, he saw that the face was rather short, a trifle angular, with a queer, charming mouth, which he felt sure the painter had tried to beautify by making too small for the chin that nicked so deeply into its rounded under-lip. "Where the bee sucks there suck I," this mouth might have described itself. It looked, though, as if it had sucked sweetness from many another thing than flowers—things rarer and more subtle—strange thoughts, fantastic day-dreams, wayward surmises concerning the dark romance of death. There was a sort of perverse, occult greed in the dart outward of the upper-lip, a look of honeyed rapacity that recalled to him the girl's speech about the daughter of the Horse



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Lecch. "Give! Give!" this mouth said without speaking.

He drew nearer, eager to find out how the thing had been done, how the painter had worked out his astonishing effect. Immediately he saw why Mr. Warrenger had called the portrait "bad." It was not of its time, had none of the smoothnesses and glazings of that school. It had not been produced by a series of preparations, but transferred direct with a full, nervous brush to the canvas, under the guidance of a vision that had evidently adored what it beheld. The colour was crude, the drawing at times execrable—as in the hands, which looked like slender gloves blown out, as women sometimes breathe into their gloves to make them keep their shape—but the triumph was there—the undescribed, indescribable something that makes a likeness "live," which gives one the feeling that in the dead paint there has been absorbed an impalpable essence from the personality of the sitter, that, in fact, some film of the soul has been caught and held by the mysterious image.

As he gazed, Radford thought it probable that the man who had painted this portrait had never done another of equal merit, or, indeed, anything approaching it. This was so convincingly, to him at least, the result of an impassioned enthusiasm, a fevered "possession" as it were. In his effort to immortalise what he worshipped, the painter had been lifted above his ordinary power, had been given, for that one time, a power

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outside himself, an evanescent magic of perception and execution that might very well have left him gaping over his own achievement.

Radford looked in vain for a signature. There was not even an initial to tell who the dead painter might have been. It was as if he had made this offering of herself to his divinity, content after its accomplishment to sink into oblivion. "Poor devil!" thought the young man. "Poor devils, I should say," he corrected himself whimsically; "for there must have been almost as many of you as the legend has it."

He took in finally the audacious fact that this "sumach"-haired beauty was dressed in pink—a "gown like a rose"—and that in the full tide of her red tresses a damask rose was half-submerged, held there by a long, pearl-headed pin thrust through its heart.

"So you were cruel even to our roses," he smiled inwardly, finding a quaint completion of the whole perverse charm of the thing, in the stabbing of a rose with a jewelled pin.

With their look of malicious sweetness, the uptilted eyes smiled back at him, inscrutable, gently mocking, heavy a little as with the opiate of secret dreams.

He looked away from them, about the room. Most of the furniture had been removed, but a small spinet, rather prettily painted, stood against one wall. She had been musical too then, this Melany; and again he gazed at the portrait, trying to imagine the quality of

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the voice that had issued from that odd, alluring mouth. And he stood very still now, waiting to see whether some sense of her invisible presence would waft to him, whether, through the perfect quietude, an influence would come stealing, as though behind the veil of her pictured face she herself in some strange, inexplicable way were watching, observing in her turn.

A soft movement in the room made him start violently, jump to face it, then he saw that the girl at the window had partly turned. There was in her attitude a constrained anguish of expectancy. It called to him more poignantly than any words could have done. He went over and stood beside her.

"Well?" she just managed to murmur, and from the pulsation in her low tone he knew how hard her heart was beating.

"Well," he echoed, his own voice sounding a little queer to him. "It's a most wonderful portrait but . . ." his hands made an expressive, rather foreign gesture, signifying an utter lack of anything worth while to offer, "but that's all," he ended.

She searched his face anxiously, almost incredulously.

"You haven't felt . . . ?"

"Except a tremendous sense of the charm and what must be the fidelity of the portrait . . . nothing," he answered.

Her anxious look passed over his shoulder, then came back to him.

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"Nothing at all . . . ? Really *nothing?*" she persisted, veiling her voice to its huskiest tone as if she were afraid of being overheard by the presence he had not felt.

"Nothing of what you mean," he admitted with a ruefulness that came half from his own disappointment, half from having to disappoint her so much. "Of course I felt her personality—who wouldn't, looking at that marvellous likeness of her; but I had no sense of her being there—of her watching *me*, you know."

The girl gave a little downcast sigh, and again her look went over his shoulder, to the room beyond.

"I can't understand it . . . I was so sure . . ." she breathed disconsolately. And as she stood there gazing past him with that troubled, questing expression, he saw her eyes dilate.

"Tell me," he blurted, "*do you feel her—now?*"

But she only gave him a forlorn head-shake in reply.

"Then—" he felt that he was blurting it again, "why do you look so anxious—almost frightened?"

Her look was all reproach now.

"Can't you think why?"

"No," he answered honestly. "In fact, I'm so stupid that I'm wondering why it doesn't come as a relief to you."

"A relief! . . . When you may be wondering too at my morbid imagination!"

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She flung this out with passion, her head thrown back; then, as he exclaimed, reproachful in his turn, hid her face in her hands.

"It wouldn't be your fault. . . . How could you believe in me . . . with nothing to prove it," came in stifled sentences from behind this piteous shield.

Radford found himself arguing about the character and habits of ghosts as if he were one of their most privileged intimates.

"But, my dear girl, don't you see . . ." he protested, "that there is nothing final in this? Even granting that I were such a gross-grained donkey as to doubt you. There's so much that must be exactly—to the finest hair—right, for them to make themselves felt—get through, you know. It's as if there were invisible doors between them and us—doors with complicated locks, combination locks—yes, that's the very word. And they must get the secret of the combination, possess it perfectly, before they can open the doors. Now, you and I, you see, have probably made a new combination for the lock on *her* door. She's doubtless there, just on the other side—as it were, listening at the key-hole—but she can't come through . . . not this time. Besides . . ." he risked a smile, as her hands dropped from her face, and her eyes turned again to his . . . "don't you think that possibly I may have 'exorcised' her? . . . That she's felt you have a knight to break lances for

## THE GHOST GARDEN 85

you now—that you aren't any longer a poor little Una alone with the lion?"

She drew a deep breath, as if this interpretation really brought her relief.

"And if that were so," she said, "you would believe in me, all the same?"

"My dear girl!" he flung out again, again smiling. "Haven't I seen for myself? Haven't I had my own queer little experience?"

Something rustled softly in the next room—a gentle shimmer of sound like the stir of silken skirts. Both started, and the girl seized his arm, clinging to it.

"She's there! She's there!" she reiterated in a whisper that had the effect on him of a piercing cry.

He put his hand down hard over hers, and they stood rigidly waiting, their eyes on the open doorway of the spinning-room. Then, all at once, she felt him relax. He even laughed, a little shakenly it must be confessed, and pointed to some dry leaves that had blown in through the open window and were drifting lightly along the floor, indicating the source of the silken rustle that had petrified them.

But she only repeated firmly:

"She's there . . . I know she's there . . . I feel her now."

"Then let's go to *her*, since she won't come to *us*,"

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Radford suggested, holding fast to the tone he had taken when he laughed.

She still lent a hand upon his arm, and he could feel through his sleeve how cold it was. So they walked, as if about to enter some ceremonious dining-hall, towards the door of the spinning-room.

## XI

THEY stood still just beyond the threshold—"with hated breath" is the only way to describe it. Radford said at last, keeping up the half playful tone that wasn't at all the expression of his real feeling:

"Well? . . . Is our hostess here? Or has she retreated afresh?"

"Don't joke about her . . . please don't," the girl pleaded.

They stood silent and still again. Presently she took away her hand from his arm. He looked his question this time.

"Yes," she whispered. "She's . . . gone."

"Then I'll let in the good, commonplace sunlight," he whispered back.

It gushed happily in, revealing the most cheerful, homelike room imaginable, smaller than the one they had left, and panelled in dim green from floor to ceiling. Corner cupboards cut off every angle, and in sunk rounds, above each panel, were paintings of macaws, still bright as bits of Oriental jewelry.

The mantelpiece was of dark orange marble, set with white medallions on which danced little negroes of



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black marble in low-relief. Above hung an enormous "sampler," done in crimsons, blues and yellows with queer, formal animals, vases blooming with impossible flowers and, at the bottom, after a row of brilliant, foliated lettering, the name in gold thread: Melany Horsemanden.

The fireplace was deep and wide, and its throat still dark from the smoke of fires long gone out. On one side of it stood a large wooden spinning-wheel, a "wool wheel," Melany explained. He had never chanced to see one before and thought it charming with its prettily turned spokes and staunchion, and alert looking "head" on which the long iron spindle was held in place by leather "ears." Its rearing body and spread legs, together with this pert head, reminded him altogether of an insect—the "praying-mantis," or, as it is called even more expressively in Virginia, "the Devil's riding-horse."

He took it in bit by bit, curiously. This, then, was the famous spinning-wheel, the "hanted wheel," as Joel had called it. He put out his hand suddenly and set it whirling. Beautifully balanced, it turned so fast that the spokes became a greyish blur. Then, astonished, he appealed to Melany.

"Why, it makes no sound whatever!" he exclaimed. "I thought a spinning-wheel made a humming noise when one turned it?"

"Not unless the band is on," she answered.

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"And what is that—the 'band'?"

"A piece of cord. It's there, wrapped around the head."

Radford glanced where she pointed and saw what he had thought only a white string used to mend some break in the ancient wheel.

"But it's new—he can't have used that!" he said, bending closer.

"Yes, it's new," the girl admitted reluctantly. "I put it there."

"You did?" He was struck by another thought. "Can you spin?"

She nodded.

"And you've spun with this very wheel? How charming!"

She began to explain in a low, hurried voice, twisting her fingers nervously together, as she looked down at them:

"I thought she might like it . . . to have some one . . . of her blood . . . spin with her wheel again . . . make it seem alive again, you know. So I got an old mountain woman to teach me. Then I came one morning, and lit a fire—it was in October—you can't spin if the room is cold—and I spun two or three bobbins full. I remember I felt quite light-hearted that morning—as if she really were pleased." Her voice died out on these words.

"And then—?"

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"It wasn't long after that I—lost my voice," she faltered.

"But you can't think—" Radford began impulsively. "I mean why *shouldn't* she be pleased with your idea? . . ." he continued. "It was a lovely one! It ought to have delighted her."

He was becoming quite used, now, to mentioning the elusive phantom as if she were a sentient being.

Melany was silent, her eyes still on her interlaced fingers.

"Come!" he said, going close to her. "I'm sure I'm right. *I've* a feeling that she *does* like it. Now that I'm here, you know, everything's going to be different—quite different. Come," he coaxed again, "you told me you felt that too, didn't you?"

Her "Yes" came on a sigh, but she half smiled.

"Good!" said Radford gaily. "And we must go on proving it."

"Proving it?"

"Yes. By all sorts of daring little liberties. For instance," he disregarded the startled look with which her eyes flitted about the room then back to his, "you're going to put that cord—'band,' you call it?—into place, and spin for me!"

She looked simply aghast.

"Oh, don't ask me that!" she wailed.

He thought he was doing the right thing to say in a hurt voice:

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"Then you aren't sure of me, after all?"

This she met with a wave of crimson to her forehead, and the little back toss of her head that showed a spirit only very partially subdued.

"It's not kind of you to say that when I've said so much!" she cried in a throbbing voice.

Radford humbled himself instantly.

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "It was only my rough way of trying to let you see how much I *want* to be kind."

Though the rose of indignation still burnt brightly in her cheeks, she gave him, at this, a wistful, abashed glance.

"I think," she murmured, "that I must ask *you* to forgive *me*—I ought to have known you only meant to be kind—after your having been so very kind already!"

Radford wished heartily just then that young men might, on occasion, put brotherly arms about young women without seeming impertinent. He had to content himself with assuring her again that he had never felt so touched, so honoured, by anything in his life as by her confidence.

"If you will help me kindle a fire, I will spin for you," was her response to this; and opening the door of a little cupboard near the chimney, she disclosed a store of "light-wood" and some hickory logs.

They knelt side by side on the hearth, absorbed as two children in a newly invented game, and together

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built up what promised to be, as Radford said, "a roaring success." He laid the big "back-log" carefully in place, under her direction; then, with a leaf torn from his notebook, set fire to the resinous kindling.

The first flames leaped up, charming as a bed of yellow tulips in the dark fireplace. There was a delicious smell of wood-smoke, as the cold chimney coughed back the first wreaths, then with gay snappings and flutterings, the whole mass "caught." Golden spark-serpents ran to and fro over the great back-log, blue and lilac tongues licked round it; then, superbly it, too, ignited, sending forth a banner of orange flame, sighing and roaring like a giant in the throes of passion. The hearthstone of "Her Wish" was warm once more.

This was the very thought that occurred to Radford as he stood there gazing down at the gorgeous result of their united effort.

"'Pleased'!" he repeated, on a ring of his pleasant laughter. "I should think she jolly well *ought* to be pleased—your elusive lady. Why, we've warmed her own particular hearthstone for her—we've lighted, you may say, the beacon of good will!" He flourished a dramatic hand. "Look how the room answers to it! I say, you know," he added with conviction, "it's really the most enchanting room!"

Melany was fetching a box of carded wool "slips" from another cupboard. She followed his look about

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the green-panelled walls, on which ruddy lights were now gleaming and waning. It gave her an impression as of a sleeping face that had opened its eyes.

"Yes," she forced herself to say, "it does look pretty in the firelight. My fire wasn't a splendid one like this."

Then he gave another exclamation of approval.

"By Jove! I hadn't noticed what a beautiful old clock this is! How did 'they' come to leave it here?"

And he stood, hands in pockets, head thrust forward, gazing at the old "subject" clock of ormolu and enamel that stood on the mantel-shelf under the big sampler.

Melany, who had gone to close the window before beginning to spin, stood there fingering a trail of ivy as if glad of this living green link with the outer world. She answered him without moving:

"It was in her will that her portrait and spinning-wheel and that clock should never be taken away."

"That's all very well," the young man threw over his shoulder, still curiously examining the clock, "but how was the miracle accomplished? *Why* did the Brooklyn person and all the others obey her? Did she leave a malediction also in her will, as the alternative? A sort of 'curst be he who moves my bones' codicil?"

"Yes," said the girl.

Radford positively sprang round to look at her.

"No! You can't mean it!" he cried, his eyes shining.

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"Yes," she said again, rather wondering at his look. "It's true. Don't you think," she added sombrely, "that it's like what one knows of her?"

"It's only too wonderfully, too delightfully like!" he cried. "It completes the whole thing to such a degree that I can't take it in. And this clock—" he turned to it again. "She must have designed it herself—it's so exactly like her—almost as much like her as that portrait must be. In a way, it is a portrait of her—of her strange, perverse mind. I simply can't imagine a queerer mixture of beauty and gruesomeness—can you?"

"To me it's only horrible," said the girl, looking away.

It *was* rather horrible. On a golden wheel poised the figure of a youth running. He held in one hand a black sickle, and in the other a mask cunningly enamelled to represent a young, smiling face. When one looked at the clock in profile, however, one saw behind this mask the real head of the figure—a skull, with serpents knotted through the empty eye-sockets.

Some words in black enamel ran across its base:

*"Après Moi—la Mort. Après la Mort—Maintes  
Choses."*

"What an extraordinary creature!" the young man kept murmuring, his eyes on this sinister timepiece that no longer kept time.

## THE GHOST GARDEN 95

Something roused him with an efficacy as startling as the icy douche that taught Grimm's young man to shiver. It was, indeed, as if a hand of ice had clapped him on the back, sending its shocking thrill to his very marrow; for behind him had sounded suddenly a strange, humming, minor chord that rose and fell, paused, then repeated itself.



## XII

**A**LMOST simultaneously with the eerier shock came a flash of comprehension in which he realised that Melany had adjusted the wheel and begun to spin. But he did not turn to her for an appreciable moment: he felt that by doing so at once he would have shown her too extraordinary a face. And the wild fact drove itself home to him, as he stood through this moment of waiting, that there was, after all, more in the legends than the mere power to work on her impressionable nerves.

When he did turn at last, however, what he saw was so winsome, so warmly lighted by the glow of immemorial associations with all that was most gracious in the homely commonplaces of life, even of poetry—did not Homer speak of the violet-wool on Helen's distaff?—that he felt the chill in his blood dissolve as by white magic.

How, he wondered, watching the girl's absorbed movements, had women ever come to give up an occupation so perfectly graceful as spinning wool?

Here, she looked round at him with a smile, and reversing the wheel, wound back the thread that she had just spun.

"Ah, don't stop," he said; "I could watch you all day. I'm painting a picture of you like that in my mind.

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In fact, I think I shall have to do it really. Don't stop—please!"

She selected one of the rolls of fluffy wool, and holding it against the point of the spindle turned the wheel rather slowly, at the same time stepping backward and "drawing out her thread" to the full length of her arm. It was as if the wool changed to fine elastic under her delicate touch. Then, when she had it long enough to twist, she set the wheel whirling rapidly, and as it whirled it hummed forth its minor song.

Radford's mind veered back to last night, when he had stood under that very window and listened to this very sound. Was it really possible . . . ? He turned with a sudden impulse, and going to the window, opened it and swung himself out over the sill. The thread that Melany was twisting snapped short, and she gave a cry and ran forward:

"Oh, don't leave me!"

He smiled back at her reassuringly, leaning on the low sill, as he had seemed to remember having leaned often before.

"Fancy my doing such a thing! I only want to see how you 'compose' as a picture, you know, from outside," he explained mendaciously. "Do go on spinning, just for a moment, won't you?"

She went rather laggingly towards the wheel, looking back at him over her shoulder as if afraid he might play her some boyish trick.

## 98 THE GHOST GARDEN

"I promise you I shan't leave this window," he called, reading her thought, "on my honour!"

And so, a little pale, a little troubled, she took up another "slip" of wool, and began to spin again.

Yes—it was the same sound that he had heard last night, rising from the cold and empty darkness behind the shuttered window. He stood a moment or two listening, then swung himself back into the room.

"Do you know," he said slowly, looking into her eyes, "I've got a real impression that I *have* 'exorcised' her?"

"You have?" she asked, and he noted the timid hope in her voice.

"I have, most positively," he affirmed. "And—think a bit—haven't you got it too—deep down somewhere, underneath your natural dread?"

She glanced about her, still timorously, and there was a surprised, lightened look on her sensitive face.

"Why, it does seem—different," she admitted finally.

"Of course it does, because it *is*!" he let himself exult, delighting in the soft wonder that darkened her eyes. "Don't you see? It's our being together that's done it. It's the two of us together that she can't bully . . ."

Her "Oh!" of protest at this crass temerity of expression didn't check him—was like a pebble thrown into a gleeful torrent.

"We're too one in our feeling against her intrusion for her to get through. We're, as I said," he laughed happily, "the lock on her door that she doesn't know

## THE GHOST GARDEN 91

the combination of! But I'll tell *you* the secret. It's that my feeling for you is stronger than my feeling for her. Oh," he continued, answering her astonished look, "I've had my temptations, let me tell you! As far as I'm concerned, you know, I'd adore seeing her! I hoped awfully at first that I'd get at least a glimpse . . ."

She did interrupt him this time.

"You—*want* to see her?" she whispered strickenly.

His gaiety didn't give an inch.

"*Wanted*, my dear girl, *wanted*," he corrected with the same self-acclaiming jubilation of tone. "You see how delighted I am with myself, because unselfishness has conquered curiosity; for your sake—for the sake of our friendship—I've given her up—utterly!"

And he threw out his hands with the foreign gesture that she liked. She stood without speaking for a time, smoothing out his crumpled sentences in her thought so as to read their full meaning. Then she said simply, if somewhat shyly:

"You mean you'd rather be kind to me, than have—" one of her quick tremors came with the next words, "some strange experience?"

"I mean that I'm *your* friend—not *her* friend. There's the whole situation. There's the lock we've put on her door!"

A third time Melany looked round the pretty room, now warm with firelight. A tremor ran through her again.

## 100 THE GHOST GARDEN

"Locks can be broken," she murmured.

"Not this one!" he exulted. "I defy her!"

And as the girl clung to his arm, moaning in an access of her old dread, "Don't! Don't!" he repeated, waving his free arm as if addressing some one invisible: "Yes, I defy you, elusive lady!"

He might have continued longer in this strain, for he was being driven by a novel, very pleasurable excitement—it was really delightful to play knight errant and break lances for such a sweet lady, against the powers of darkness—but the white misery of her face stopped him.

"I'm awfully sorry I've upset you with my nonsense," he said. "But I'm so sure she isn't here—can't possibly be here. Try for yourself—I'll be quite still—try to see whether you feel her in any way."

During their silence the fire fluttered softly, and a mouse played with a nut that it had hoarded inside the wainscoting. There was no other sound.

He bent down his head to her.

"It's so, isn't it? She's not here . . . not anywhere near, is she?"

Her face turned towards him slowly, and he had the impression of some one half-dazed by an unhopd-for rescue.

"No," she murmured, in a voice that matched her look, a voice dim with happy amazement. "You've come between us."

## THE GHOST GARDEN 101

"Ah, and I'll stay between you!" he cried.

They covered the fire with ashes before they went.

"It's really 'ashes to ashes' this time," said Radford, as he heaped the last shovelful over the embers, yielding once more to the daring desire to jest that beset him.

"I've 'laid' her for you, on her own hearthstone."

But Melany only gave him a beseeching look, paling again. It would take a long time for her to feel as secure behind that invisible lock as he seemed to feel.

### XIII

THIS singular visit to "Her Wish" was the beginning of an even rarer intercourse. Love at first sight is supposed to be an exquisite and unusual experience, but the spiritual intimacy, almost as of spirits disembodied, that had sprung up between them on that occasion, was altogether of a subtler, more unique quality. No actual person or circumstance, Radford reflected, with a somewhat amused tenderness for the queer source of it all, could have brought them so really together, as they had been brought by that elusive, fascinating phantom. He had not, indeed, lost his sense of her as fascinating, though his loyalty to the girl's lovely confidence in him kept him staunch in his determination to "ward her off," "to stay between them," as he had declared that he would.

However, there are as many paths to love as there are lovers to take them, and when, at the end of two weeks, there came a letter from Steven, stating lugubriously that he would be compelled to go to New Orleans for at least a month, Radford was delighted in spite of his affection for Steven. He thought, by this time, that he knew quite well why the box-hedges of "Her Wish" had seemed a boundary of Fate, why the whole place

## THE GHOST GARDEN 103

had been so mystically familiar. It was in his Scots blood—his mother had been a Stewart—and also in his individual sensitiveness to occult impressions, to believe in their hidden meaning, as of mystic sign-posts pointing the way.

He even by this time felt that he also had "known" Melany when he first looked on her. She was his "dream of Fair Women" made actual—his artist's vision in the delicate flesh. Ah, the wilful phantom had her perverse kindnesses, after all; for if the living Melany had not lost her "wonderful voice," would she not have been lost to him? He had the grace, it is true, to blush for this leap to light in him of the hidden primordial selfishness of love, but his shame made it none the less true. He could not, he felt convinced, though hating himself for the conviction, even for her sweet sake, have played the rôle of semi-detached husband to a successful Prima Donna. And he had desolate pictures of himself waiting in the "wings" with wraps and cordials, while Melany, to the music of her most wonderful high notes, died in a blond wig and the arms of the Primo Tenore. But in that case, too, he consoled himself, neither would she have consented to play the rôle of wife to any man. Her charming old father had described her once as "dedicated" to her art. How much more fitting it was, he further consoled himself, that a being so exquisite should be dedicated, "set apart and consecrated," to love—such love as he would give her. He felt a shud-



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der of revulsion through all his sensitiveness when he thought of her as surrounded by the gross rivalries and amours, the heart-killing excitement and soul-stifling successes of an operative "career." But he had also the largeness to realise that Art, in whatever form, is to its devotee still the highest. He ached for her bitter disappointment, even while he could not help rejoicing in his love for her, but when he thought of how her love for him might drown that disappointment in its radiant waves, this ache of sympathy dissolved into exultation. His whole existence would be spent, if she could but love him, in proving to her that her loss had really been her gain—proving it by a thousand beautiful indirectnesses, previsions, revelations.

Radford was peculiarly free from the ordinary ties of life—was eminently fitted both by fortune and his own delightful personality to play Magician Extraordinary in the life of the woman he loved. But though he had few relations—some cousins here and there and the grim old great-aunt who had brought him up—he had many friends. He imagined how these friends would welcome Melany—the fineness of their appreciation, their charmed wonder when he described to them the wild, unlikely though beautiful place in which he had discovered her. Yes, mysteriously discovered her, that was it. She was his discovery—the sleeping princess in the wood, only waiting to awaken to the fulness of beauty and joy with his first kiss.

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Not that he had lived to thirty without falling in love till now. In fact he had fallen in and out of that agreeable state—he was one of those who had found it agreeable—several times. But, as Sganarelle wisely observed, "*il y a des fagots et des fagots*," and this time he felt that his "fagot" was a veritable twig from the Hesperidian tree—a twig to which clung an apple of mystic gold—the final, the perfect love. That it should be a little cold, a little hard as it were to the touch, was only what might have been expected in a fruit the rind of which was pure gold. And here he had laughed, suddenly aware that his poetisings had landed him plump in the middle of a simile which if carried out must end in the idea that his love before satisfying him would have to be peeled!

It was true, though, that something in the nature of a fine rind intercepted his contact with the girl's innermost heart. It was curious, he reflected, how, when she had so unveiled her spirit to him, there should be still a portion of herself so completely withdrawn. In a word, he could not make out whether her feeling for him, beyond that marvellous sympathy of spiritual understanding, was more akin to love or to gratitude, or merely an affectionate blending of both.

His pain, when these doubts assailed him, was an evidence to himself of the reality, at least, of his love for her. At the end of his third week at Hilton he decided that he could not endure them any longer.

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They had been for a long walk in the mountains, and on their way back lingered to watch the last effects of the sunset. Indian Summer was late this year, the air was still wonderfully mild, but the sky had put on its winter splendours. A huge pinion of cloud, springing from the ruddy shoulder of the West, swept out above them and lit the extreme East with its tapering, golden quills. Except for this one, gigantic magnificence, the heaven was austere bare.

"Look," said Melany, pointing to the plumage on the curve of the great wing. "I've never seen clouds like that—all gold-green and rose, like opals. I've seen the sky itself look so, but never clouds . . ."

Radford's reply to this was somewhat peculiar. He drew down the pointing hand and held it against his breast.

"I think you know," he said, "how I love you."

Her face, illumined by the reflection from the gorgeous immensity she had been gazing at, was pathetically his to read, and even in that reflected glow he saw, to his dismay, how white it went, and how her eyes fixed helplessly on his, spread as if with fear. The next instant, she had slipped into the arms held out to her, as sweetly, as inevitably, as water slips into some natural hollow. He felt her all fluent in the refuge of his arms—as if love had dissolved her, body as well as spirit. Or was this only his fond imagining? Wasn't it love, after all, that kept her so still against him—that made

## THE GHOST GARDEN 107

her light weight almost a heaviness? Had some dread overwhelmed her suddenly? He knew perfectly that, though he had allayed her mystic fear, he had not quite overcome it.

He stood holding her in silence for a full moment. Then he had to speak.

"Won't you tell me," he said, "if I can think that you love me too?"

At this she drew herself trembling together, and with her face bent down, whispered:

"I am afraid . . . I am afraid to love you."

"Oh, my own!" he cried, and drew her back into his

arms

But now she resisted him.

"Don't keep me," she said. "I must tell you. I must tell you first."

"At least your hand then," he smiled. "Let me keep that much of you—for the present. What, dearest," he continued, as she did not speak, "are you afraid of?"

She left her hand in his, and he drew off her glove, murmuring:

"How cold this poor little hand is! Perhaps you'd better wait to tell me till we get back."

She seemed not to hear him, not to realise that he was kissing and fondling the hand she had yielded him.

"I had a dreadful dream last night," she at last brought out, shuddering. "It was a dream—but more than a dream."

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"More? How more?"

He held her hand fast between his own now, as if he would reassure her with his steady clasp.

"I thought," she went on in the curious, toneless voice he had first heard during their first walk to "Her Wish," "that I was awake. I was lying in my own bed, in my own room. And something said, 'Come!' Then I thought that a dark wind"—she shuddered again—"a cold, strong current of air, like a . . . yes, it was like a resistless river . . . lifted me and bore me out, into the night . . . over the fields and woods . . . up to that door . . . that terrible door . . ."

She was shaking so now that he put his arm about her without more ado, and held her against his side. She pressed close to it as if only for warmth, for human warmth in her cold ague of fear caused by the supernatural: there was no sense of his being her lover in that straining of her shuddering body against him. Now she tripped and stumbled over her thronging words:

"I thought the dreadful air-river pressed me against that door and it opened . . . I was sucked in . . . into the darkness . . . into the emptiness . . . through that corridor . . . through that other door . . . into that room . . . up to her portrait. It was alight, glowing . . . it was looking at me. . . . The lips parted . . . it spoke to me . . ." With frantic horror she repeated twice: "It spoke to me! . . . It spoke to me!"

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"My darling," said Radford, his cheek to hers, "my darling, it was only a dream—a hideous, beastly dream."

"It was more. . . . Oh! it was more!" she wailed, and her soft cheek felt cold to his as death. "It was a warning . . . a command. 'Do not dare to love him' . . . it said. 'Do not dare to love him' . . . Oh! the black malice of those eyes—those awful, painted, *living* eyes!"

She shook and shook with the memory of that grisly visitation.

Alarm began to mingle with the ardour of his love. Could it be, as he had first feared, that her insistent dwelling on these dark things, had slightly destroyed the balance of her mind? Well, if it were so—and he had a rush of thankfulness that his love was real enough to meet even this test—the sooner he could persuade her to marry him, the better. There could be no better proof than the passionate completion of such a love as theirs, that her terrors had no foundation in reality.

"Now that you've told me that, tell me one other thing," he said, holding her so close that she felt his violent young heart against her side. "Tell me whether you love me?"

But she only kept gasping: "I am afraid . . . I am afraid . . . for you . . . for you . . ."

"For *me*?" He caught at it joyously. "For *me*?" he repeated. "Why, you dearest thing, haven't I told you over and over, that *I've* no fear of her?"

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"Yes, but through me . . . She might hurt you through me."

At this he fairly laughed, a laugh of angry defiance.

"Let her try to touch you!" he cried. "Just let her try to harm a hair of your darling head!"

Though how he would have punished the presuming ghost, even lovers might fail to imagine.

"Why as to that," he rushed on, "how *could* she hurt me more than by frightening you into not being willing to marry me? *There* would be a devilish cunning, if you like—though I don't admit for a moment any reality in your abominable dream. Why, my dearest, dearest girl, fancy allowing not even a ghost, but a *dream* about a ghost, to come between us!"

"You forget," she said, resuming her first sad, colourless tone, "that things I've felt . . . this way . . . have come true."

He had a quick answer for this.

"I spoke of you allowing her to come between us—but haven't we agreed that I've already come between you and her?"

"Oh, I did think you had!" was her piteous response.

"You don't think so any longer?"

"How can I—after what I've told you?" She had drawn herself away from him, but he still kept firm hold of her hand.

"Dearest," he said after a slight pause, with a tender modulating of his vibrant young voice to her dejected

## THE GHOST GARDEN 111

mood, "you've told me more than perhaps you meant to. You've told me, in spite of words, that you love me."

Her hand quivered in his, trying to release itself, and she stammered in great distress:

"No . . . No . . . I said I was afraid to . . ."

"Ah, but that's just it!" he subdued himself again.

"Isn't it precisely your love for me that *makes* you afraid?"

"It can't be! . . . It mustn't be!" she cried, half rising, and he heard the tears that he wouldn't look at, in her voice.

He drew her down beside him, and gently inexorable, again folded his arms about her.

"Listen, dearest," he said in a grave voice quite new to her. "You said something to me once that I may seem cruel to remind you of, but for both our sakes, I must do it. You spoke, that first day, of being afraid of something much more terrible than she is . . ." He pressed her so jealously to him now that it was hard for her to breathe. "Of being afraid of . . . madness. My own,"—his face was bent to hers, and in the gathering dusk she could see the bright anxiety of his eyes—"that is still what you must be most afraid of. . . . *That* you must fight against with all the terror of your soul. . . . And with all your love for me, and mine for you."

She lay quite still on his breast, her face, white and clear as pearl, even to the lips, returned to his, her look clinging to his, as if that steady gaze were all that



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held her from slipping into an abyss. And it was on those cold, pale lips that he sealed and pressed home the assurances of the love that would rescue her, and hold her from the depths forever.

#### XIV

**A**LTHOUGH the shock that he had administered with such daring wisdom had the effect he hoped for, of turning her from her shadowy terror to face a more real one, he was forced, by that very whirl of hers in the direction he had pointed out, to act as if he took into account a certain reality also in the phantasmal influence against which she struggled.

It had wrung his heart, during the first days after their tragic love scene, to see her eyes clouded with that new fear—to have her say to him again and again:

"But how can you *want* me to love you? . . . If there's *this* danger . . . I am more afraid than ever to love you!"

Over and over he explained to her, coaxing, conjuring, that there *was* no danger, so long as she didn't "give way," didn't let her will slip from her keeping, didn't, as he paraphrased it with his warm smile of confident love, "let herself see dreams as ghosts walking."

"All that you've got to do, my best beloved," he urged on her, "is to love me with all your might, and resist dark thoughts—dark powers, if you like—with all your love for me! They're, after all, less than shadows. We are the real thing!"

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But her attempts at smiling back at him were desolate little failures. It was when she said to him one day, with the most heart-breaking note of wistful aloneness in her voice: "Then—you never really believed I had—cause—to feel so?" that he felt the imperative need of qualifying his position, of making her sure, once for all, that he had never deceived her, that it was not the truth of her assertions concerning the dark influence that he doubted, but her magnifying of it, her letting her fancy make her think it there when it had been withdrawn.

He took, in his perplexity, a wounded, reproachful tone with her. How could she bear the sight of him, he demanded, if she thought for a moment that he had feigned to believe just to ingratiate himself with her? How could she tolerate the idea of a love that had been based on a cheap falseness from the first? If that was her opinion of him, he had better go at once. He even piled it on, rather, by saying bitterly that he could fight ghosts far better than such misconceptions.

Here, to his unspeakable chagrin, she had burst into tears, shaking like a frail sapling under the blow of an axe, and just managing between her sobs:

"Yes . . . go . . . go . . . It will be much better for you to go . . ."

Then he had a thought which struck him, like so many of his thoughts about her in those days, as inspirational.

## THE GHOST GARDEN 115

"Melany!" he cried. "I *will* go . . . but to *her*!"

She looked stunned, staring at him through her tears with the senseless eyes of stupefaction.

"I mean," he hurried to explain himself, "that I so believe in her . . . the way *you* believe in her . . . that I shall try to . . . how shall I put it? . . . to get in touch with her. I am not afraid of her. I rather feel, as I've told you, that *she's* afraid of *me*! I shall go and . . . have it out with her!" he wound up.

This amazing declaration dried her tears as if with a hot iron—dried her throat and lips.

"You'll go . . . How? Where?" she got out finally.

"To 'Her Wish' . . . by myself . . . for a night."

Now she was clinging to him as unashamed as a wife.

"No! No! No!" she cried. "No! Never!"

They were out of doors, in the wood above Hilton, and he leaned against a tree with her in his arms, soothing her, caressing her, trying to get her to understand his point of view.

"It's this way, my dearest heart," he said, when she was quieted at last. "If I go there . . . in this way . . . I give her her fullest chance. If she means you harm, she'll have to get past me . . . And if she can't get past me . . . and I know she can't . . . why, then, she can't get to you . . . as you'll have me with you always."

"But . . ." the girl moaned, "if she should harm you?"

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"My dear child," he returned patiently. "She simply can't. I have 'feelings'"—he threw his bright, assured smile over her gloom—"as well as you. *Why*, for one thing, should she want to harm me?"

"Because I love you," said Melany.

He forgot their strange trouble and made her forget it for a moment, in the kiss he gave her for this.

"There's my invincible armour!" he cried happily, coming out of the sweet trance.

"What?" she breathed.

"Why, your love for me—my love for you—*our* love. That's the flaming sword that will turn any power of darkness!"

She pressed her cheek against his arm, looking down, twisting her fingers in his.

"If only . . ." he heard her murmur.

"If only what, dear?"

"If only you hadn't defied her . . ."

"I do defy her! I do! I do!" he reiterated. "Isn't she the fiery dragon I'm going to fight for you? That I'm going to seal up in her dark cavern forever and aye!"

He drew the girl round in front of him, and took her face in his hands as if it were a chalice that he would drink from.

"Look at me and *see* how sure my love makes me," he said. "Look deep in my eyes—don't you see the will

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you've put there? The will to overcome anything, everything that troubles you?"

She sighed with that full look and her eyes closed as if to keep the love he had poured into them from brimming over.

"You must do as you think best," she said.

"And you'll trust me? You'll trust the power of my love? You won't sit up all night imagining horrors?"

"Oh, I couldn't sleep! I couldn't lie down!" she cried a little wildly.

"Hasn't what you have seen in my eyes made you *know* she can't hurt me? That *I* can control *her*, but that she'll be helpless against me? My God!" he broke out with passion. "If you don't feel that, you don't feel the power of love!"

"Yes; I do feel it," she said, life coming into her voice, and the ring of courage. "I do feel it. I shan't be afraid. I'm not afraid any more."

And with her hand on his neck, and her eyes closed again, she murmured over and over, as if it were a strong charm against evil, which in truth it is:

"The power of love . . . The power of love!"

Radford was a little astonished at the way the old gentleman took it. They had decided that he must be told of his guest's intention of spending a night alone

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in the old house, and Radford had imagined him slyly amused over such an ingenuous desire. On the contrary, however, the dear old man looked decidedly uneasy at the suggestion.

"Alone?" he asked. "Quite alone? . . . You wish to spend the night in that great, cold house . . . and alone?"

"Well, I have an idea it might be more—interesting alone," the young man said lightly.

Mr. Warrenger took a nervous turn about the room.

"My dear young friend," he then said, "I feel, I confess, a responsibility . . . a responsibility, you know. I mean"—he shuffled off again in his delightful slippers, that had cross-stitch dog's-heads on the toes—"there are always chances of unfortunate coincidences in these . . . a . . . these . . . a . . . ventures." He became more blunt in his evident aversion from the experiment. "Very serious consequences have been known to follow such . . . a . . . undertaking." He evidently hated to put a pat name to it. "Shocks to the nervous system. . . . We are all human, you know . . . the bravest of us." He was charming in his attempts to soften what Radford felt, now, he meant to be a refusal. "Cæsar himself, I am sure, would have felt as unnerved as Brutus, had the cases been reversed at Philippi!"

And he smiled at the young man uncertainly. Radford seized the opportunity.

"Then you *do* believe . . . in such things?" he asked.

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The old gentleman winced, as if Radford had tossed the classic glove in his face.

"'Believe' is . . . a . . . a very weighty word," he pronounced gravely. "But I am convinced . . . Yes, I may say convinced that there are . . . a . . . influences that might perhaps . . . a . . . linger . . . in a house so ancient, and that has sheltered such . . . a . . . vehement personalities."

"Ancient!" Radford thought of Glamis Castle and a few other venerable ghostly strongholds, and smiled inwardly at this term as applied to "Her Wish."

He said quietly however:

"I've seen what you might call an apparition before now, sir. I think you may count on my not being unnerved even if I do chance to see one at 'Her Wish.' In fact,"—he beamed it at the old gentleman—"to be quite candid, that, of course, is why I want to spend the night there."

Mr. Warrenger actually paled, to Radford's increasing surprise, and ruffled up his flossy locks.

"My dear lad . . ." he protested. "My dear lad . . . why *should* you?"

"Don't you think yourself, sir," Radford couldn't help putting it to him, "that it would be rather wonderful to see that famous lady, in a 'gown like a rose'?"

"If I might suggest," returned the other, more and more uneasy, "I would not jest about her . . . That is," he explained a little incoherently . . . "she is associated



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with misfortune . . . tragedy, I might say. Come," he produced his most winning smile, "give up the idea. At best you would most likely catch a severe influenza."

Radford shook his head gaily.

"I'm no more afraid of influenza than I am of ghosts," he said.

"Oh, of . . . ghosts . . ." the old man said vaguely. "It is not precisely . . . a . . . ghosts that I . . . a . . . refer to . . . but even subtler influences."

He drew near the fire, warming his hands as if suddenly chilly, and looked over his shoulder at Radford.

"Pray, pray give it up," he murmured beseechingly.

"My dear Mr. Warrenger," said the young man, rising and crossing over to him, "of course if you really object to my going, there's nothing more to say. But I'm probably the least nervous person in the world, about such things, and—well I'll confess I've simply set my heart on it." He emphasised this by adding, "You see Steve wrote me you'd be sure to let me 'have a shy at the Her Wish ghost' . . . those are Steve's disrespectful words, not mine. But of course, as I said, if you object . . ."

He left it thus in the air, dangling with its suggestion of weird inhospitality before the old Virginian—to whom hospitality was the chief mark of gentleness.

With a dissenting sigh he gave in.

"Well," he said, "since you have set your heart on it I consent. But at least you must have a fire to keep you company, and rugs, and a lamp . . ."

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Radford couldn't help laughing.

"All my thanks," he said. "I'm most grateful, but do spare me the lamp . . . A candle—a taper it's called in ghost-stories, isn't it?—would be so much more in keeping."

"No, no! A lamp—I insist!" said the old man positively. "When," he added, "do you propose making the—*the visit?*"

"To-night," said Radford.

"Then I must arrange for these preparations immediately. Let me see . . ." He reflected with the knuckle of his forefinger against his lip. "Isaac is a sensible fellow, Isaac shall take over the paraphernalia for your . . ." he smiled dubiously, "let us hope it will be for your comfort."

Melany of course had not been present at this interview, and Radford thanked his stars that she had not. As for that, he reflected smiling again over his host's foreboding reluctance, it was surely a lucky thing that he, Radford himself, was not of a nervous tendency in regard to the supernatural.

He realised just then, with an inner start at his own credulity, that he was indeed looking forward to that night's experience with peculiar zest. An almost romantic eagerness. It was as if, secure in the chastity of a supreme love, he were going to risk an interview with some famous seductress!

RADFORD decided that he would walk over to "Her Wish" shortly after tea, while there was still some daylight left. In reply to Melany's distressed protest at the idea of his going without his "supper," he said laughingly that he didn't think a feast of Cynthia's waffles a fitting preparation for mystic adventure, and reminded her that Mr. Warrenger had insisted on Isaac's taking over, with the other articles, a bottle of wine and some sandwiches.

"It's quite as if I were going on a ghostly picnic, I assure you," he ended. "Besides, when one is screwed up for such an occasion, the last thing in the world that one feels is hunger!"

At this assertion her eyes quickened with the most piercing question, and she came closer, laying her hand on his breast, as she looked up at him.

"Oh, yes," he admitted, "I *am* screwed up a bit, but I find it rather pleasant!"

The day had begun in mist, which instead of melting into sunlight by eleven o'clock, as it usually did on these mountains, had increased as the hours wore on, so that by now its milky gauze hung in the nearest trees.

They were standing on the front steps together, while

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Mr. Warrenger, who would not hear of Radford's walking over without him, put on his long cape and hat in the hall. Radford noticed, as he looked down at her, how prettily each loose strand of her bronze hair was threaded through beads of moisture. He told her of it, saying:

"You should never wear any jewels less delicate," and managed to leave a kiss on its damp softness before Mr. Warrenger turned to join them, while Melany had time to whisper:

"I shall be with you . . . I shall be asking God all night to watch over you."

She stood gazing after them as they walked away, until they were only dark blurs that grew less and less behind the veil of mist, vanishing finally into its blank whiteness as into the heart of mystery. As this thought came to her, the girl clenched her hands, and gave that little back-toss of the head, fighting against her own dread, as she had promised him to do, with all her might and with all her love for him.

"At least nature seems in accord with your strange desire," the old gentleman said with a rather rueful attempt at pleasantry, as they reached the door of "Her Wish" and stood looking back over the lawn to the great hedges that loomed dim and phantasmal through the mist. "The very landscape looks ghostly."

"It looks marvellously beautiful," said Radford, his artist's sense charmed with the faint etching of bare

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branches against the mist. Even close at hand the trees were veiled with it, so that they rose pale and indistinct, as if transformed by magic into some finer substance—as if they might be growing at the bottom of an enchanted, pearl-coloured lake.

And this dense, pearly vapour closed down beyond the great hedges—blotting out hills and fields, blotting out the world, hemming in the quiet place with blank whiteness. The thought came to Radford that the day was like a pale, patient blind-woman, waiting in perfect stillness for some revelation.

“I am very glad, however,” Mr. Warrenger pursued, “that the weather is not cold, and that I have provided some cheer for you within.”

As he spoke he entered the house, and opening a door on the right, disclosed with pride the room he had selected for Radford’s vigil. A good deal of the original furniture had been left in “Her Wish” by the various owners, he explained, as a possible bait to future purchasers, and in this apartment were some fine pieces of black mahogany, a big “settle” covered with green leather, and a folding card-table. This table, Isaac had unfolded and spread with a white cloth under the direction of Mr. Warrenger, who had driven over with his servant earlier in the afternoon, and upon the cloth was a cheerful array of silver, glass and china, flanked by a bottle of claret, and lit up by the reflection of a log fire.

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"I was determined," the old gentleman said, in reply to Radford's exclamation, "that whatever might be lacking in your ghostly consolations, you should not want for creature comforts."

His amiable pleasantries had a quavering note, and Radford suspected him of indulging in them as one is supposed to whistle in the dark to keep up one's courage. For his own part, he felt no need of keeping up his courage, as yet. The big room looked friendly and protective in the firelight, and the green armchair that matched the settle seemed almost too comfortable a nook from which to watch for spectral visitants. One might doze off and "miss the whole show," so to speak.

He thanked his host profusely, and helped him to light the lamp—a simple affair with a green shade—before he went.

When he parted from him at the front door, however, Mr. Warrenger had a more serious word to offer:

"My dear boy," he said, his hand on Radford's arm, his old face looking wavering and queer, in the last of the queer, misty daylight, "let me beg of you—let me, indeed, implore you—as one who has some experience—don't try to brave it out if your nerves begin to fail you. Give it up. Leave this place and come straight back to Hilton. What is it you young fellows say nowadays? Cut and run—that's it . . . Cut and run . . ."

Radford assured him that he wasn't a bit above cutting and running if things became unbearable; indeed, that

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he promised to do so; and with this promise, and a wringing handshake, the old gentleman took his departure, somewhat comforted if not satisfied.

Notwithstanding his assurances to Mr. Warrenger, however, it was with a certain sense of being "marooned" that the young man watched the figure of his friend fade gradually into the mist—"marooned" on a haunted island. He stood on the porch watching him, until the last, vague outline had vanished, and there was only before him that blind white wall shutting out the world, shutting out all living creatures but himself.

He decided that before settling down to his night's watch he would take a turn about the grounds, and he found himself, after five minutes of this lonely prowling, gazing up at a holly-tree in full berry, with another queer feeling. He had no flowers, but would not a sprig of the flame-coloured berries be a suitable propitiatory offering to lay on the grave of so fiery a lady? He broke off the handsomest one that he could reach and went down a flagged path toward the "Maze" and so into the rose-garden.

"Surely," he thought, his heart quickening a little in spite of his will to be perfectly calm and matter-of-fact, "if I am to see her—what better place and hour?"

But the grave lay quiet as a child asleep. The rose-trees beaded with silver-drops gave forth no fragrance, and he shivered a little, noticing how the fine, white grasses on that grave were also jewelled just as the bronze

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hair he loved had been. He stood there long minutes after he had placed the sprig of holly on the pale grass, but no presence made itself felt, there was no hint of another consciousness besides his own.

He went back to the house, and after mending the fire, which had somewhat died down, lighted one of the candles that Isaac had left on the mantelpiece, and went out for a general survey of the irregular halls and passages. He had not closed the shutters, and the mist drawing in with night was like the blind white face he had imagined, pressed close against the glass.

He found the door of the corridor leading to the haunted wing shut, and opening it, passed down the corridor and opened also the door of the first room. Then with the candle lifted he went and stood before the portrait.

And now suddenly the thought of his poor Melany's fearful dream came back to him, the painted lips above him seemed to move in the wavering candle-light. He forced himself to go nearer and to look steadily, and afresh he was struck by the malicious sweetness of the sidelong eyes, and the honeyed rapacity of the mouth.

"Seductive and cruel you were," he mused. "Seductive and cruel, elusive lady. No wonder my poor love's afraid of your wilful wraith."

He spoke these last words aloud, rather from the motive of which in thought he had accused Mr. Warrenger—the instinct to whistle for courage in dark places—



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and suddenly the candle-flame flared high, then dropped to a blue point and went out. Radford set his teeth and struck several matches before he could relight it. That natural effect of some draught, as he told himself, had given him a start—frankly a rather disagreeable one. He forced himself again to stare at the portrait, then left the room and returned to his fire, and the book he had laid near the lamp.

## XVI

**I**T was one of three that he had discovered on the mantelpiece when he took down the candle, a worn, calf-bound version of the "Travels of Sir John Mandeville, from the Cotton Manuscript." This curious old book he had long wanted to read, and he could think of no more impersonal and fantastic companion for his eerie vigil. It chanced to open at a chapter whose headings caught his fancy by their quaint juxtaposition of highly differing subjects.

*"Of the lands of Albania and Libia. Of the wishings for watching of the Sparrow-hawk: and Noah's ship."*

Leaving the door into the hall wide open, and placing his chair so that it faced the darkness without, he drew the lamp towards him and began to read. It was not till he came to the story of the Castle of the Sparrow-hawk that he found by the odd fatality which is so often shown in trifles, and left out of greater things, that he had chanced upon a ghost story.

*"And in that country," wrote Sir John, "is an old Castle that stands upon a rock; the which is clept the Castle of the Sparrow-hawk . . . where men find a Spar-*

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*row-hawk upon a perch right fair and right well made, and a fair lady of faerie that keepeth it. And who will watch that Sparrow-hawk seven days and seven nights . . . Without company and without sleep, that fair lady shall give him when he hath done, the first thing that he will wish of earthly things; and that hath been proved often times.*

*And one time befell, that a King of Armenia, that was a worthy knight and doughty man, and a noble prince, watched that hawk some time. And at the end of seven days and seven nights the lady came to him and bade him wish, for he had well deserved it. And he answered that he was great lord enough and well in peace, and had enough of worldly riches; and therefore he would wish none other thing, but the body of that fair lady to have it at his will. And she answered him, that he knew not what he asked, and said that he was a fool to desire that he might not have; for she said that he should not ask but earthly thing, for she was none earthly thing, but a ghostly thing. And the King said that he ne would ask none other thing."*

The legend concluded by telling how the lady put a curse upon him for his boldness, so that "never since, neither the King of Armenia nor the Country were never in peace; ne they had never sith plenty of goods; and they have been sithen always under tribute of the Saracens."

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Laying down the book, to light a comfortable pipe, the young man spent some amused moments in thinking over this singular reason for the misfortunes of a people—misfortunes that have certainly endured to the present day. Then taking up "The Travels" again, he re-read the story of the fair lady who called herself "a ghostly thing." It was an odd coincidence. He pulled out his watch. Only ten o'clock! Did one always have to wait till the accepted hour of midnight for ghostly happenings, he wondered. Then he remembered how the hum of the spinning-wheel had sounded from the "haunted-room" at an earlier hour than this.

He went to the door, out into the dark hall and listened intently. Nothing stirred in the great, empty house, but outside the wind was rising. It sighed in the bare branches of the trees with an infinite melancholy, as of a creature whose wings were tired, as if now and then it must perforce sink to the earth to rest them.

He turned back again, and finding that he was prosaically hungry all at once, poured out a glass of wine and a sandwich. Then lowered the lamp, finally extinguishing it altogether.

The fire, fallen now into a mass of embers, lit the room with a steady but subdued glow. The night was so mild that he decided to let it go out entirely. He had matches, and in his pocket was a small electric torch.

Having thrown over his knees the rug that Mr. War-

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renger's kindness had provided, he settled himself in the armchair to wait, his eyes on the dark doorway.

He had no memory of his eyes closing, but he started up as if from a blow, to find the fire completely out, and the room surging with a feathery darkness. The rug had slipped from his knees and it seemed to him that the air had grown intensely cold. A strong, icy current was sweeping through the room—probably, he told himself, the draught from the open door to the fireplace.

The sudden plunge from sleep had unnerved him for the moment, so that he did not wait to strike a match but hurriedly turned on the little torch. His watch said five o'clock. Five o'clock! He simply could not believe it—that he had stupidly, ignominiously slept through the greater part of what was to have been a unique night! He gave an exclamation of annoyance—then held his breath, the nerves of his skin pringling as from an electric contact. Still holding his breath, he listened, but the blood so rushed past his ears that he seemed trying to listen through the noise of surf. Then, distinctly, dominantly, it reached him, a low, minor chord rising and falling, pausing, then repeating itself again. . . .

He went as if drawn by some magnetic force he could not resist—as if impelled by the icy current in which he stood—out of the door, along the hall, down the corridor towards the “spinning-room”—and as he went, the memory of Melany's dream rushed over him, and he

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thought, "I am dreaming of a dream. This isn't happening."

But this was only for a second; in the next he put out all his will-power, clutched himself hard, realised where he was and what he was doing and that his own will and nothing else impelled him.

He went through the first chamber where the portrait was, into the spinning-room, and stopping in the middle of the floor, turned his torch slowly about him. There was no sound, no stir of any sort. The wheel stood motionless where Melany had left it. He even noticed that the band was still wrapped about the "head."

Turning off the torch, he remained quite still in the darkness, listening as if with a sense finer than that of his body. He stood there for some ten minutes, then turned slowly towards the door, guessing his direction. He was rather flatly sure, now, that he had imagined that sound, with perception muffled by sleep; still, he would "give her her chance," as he put it in his thought, with a mocking irritation for his asinine floundrings in the slough of sleep. The least he could do was not to light up her mystic chamber again, with the beastly commonplace of an electric torch.

Then it was that it came, with nerve-shattering suddenness—a pang of sound, sharp as a stiletto through the darkness—ringing, vibrating, keeping up with a congealing insistence of reality its clear note.

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He whirled to face it, aiming the white light like a weapon at the spot whence it had come.

The glare fell on the "subject" clock below the sampler, revealing its every delicate curve and chiselling, and as Radford stared, with clenched teeth and damp forehead, the golden figure lowered its mask, and the ivory death's-head turned slowly towards him.

## XVII

**F**OR some seconds he stood, in the immemorial phrase, "rooted to the spot with horror"; it was so terribly, so odiously different from anything that he was prepared for—this living movement of dead matter that had been always "dead." Then, with a sense of being jerked to ordinary consciousness from the slumber of nightmare, he perceived that the clock was "going." From whatever cause, the mechanism had been set in motion, and it was its astounding effect that he was now witnessing. This effect, though, was still ghastly enough. The faint ticking of the old timepiece in that sinister stillness of the haunted room, was like the sudden beating of a heart from a closed coffin; and the stiff movement of the figure above it horribly suggested the movements of a bewitched corpse.

But though the chill of his first dread was still upon him, Radford watched the extraordinary pantomime with an absorbed curiosity. The figure, after having lowered its mask, and turned on him its expressionless grimace, had begun little by little to sink with its wheel into a hollow space behind the enamelled "rock" that had supported it. It disappeared entirely, and there



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was for a second or two only the faint ticking of the clock. Then slowly there began to emerge, from the space where it had disappeared, first the foliage, then the lovely perfection of a flower—a full-blown rose, so exquisite in its artifice that the enamelled petals seemed transparent in the round of electric light. There was a click—a whirr—then silence. The clock had stopped again.

As he stood there, fascinated by this lively dénouement of an episode that had begun in stark horror, a conviction began to steal over Radford with the slow sureness of a rising tide. There was a meaning in it all, a message. The rose, blooming so sweetly above that vanished image of death, meant something—something for him in particular—was there as a sign, a token, a guarantee. He noticed suddenly, with an inner start, that its colour had changed. It had at first an almost vermilion glow; now it had taken on a tone of mauve. At the same time he realised that the whole wall above it was lighter, and glancing round he saw that the dawn had come, was filtering in through the faded green of the Venetian blinds.

He shut off his torch, and turned again to the mysterious rose, that now revealed itself palely, purely pink in the cold daybreak. It was indeed a lovely reproduction of the old-fashioned rose called “Damask”—the flower *she* had loved best. He sensed its meaning, the whole amazing purpose of it all. There alone with the dawn

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and the mystic flower, his thoughts had the simplicity of a child's working out a fairy tale. The hand, that from that strange "other world" could reach to turn a spinning-wheel, had set the quaint mechanism of the clock once more in motion—had caused the image of death to disappear, and the rose of life to bloom above it—as a sign of good-will, of the withdrawal of enmity. Had he not come to "have it out with her"—to seek issue with her for the sake of the one he loved, and whom she had so darkly obsessed? And was not this her message of capitulation? Her beautiful admission to him that her power was less than the power of his love? The hour had struck—the hour that marked the relinquishment of her weird sovereignty—that set the rose of life where death had reigned.

His thoughts grew in clearness with the growing daylight, until when at last he turned to leave the room that was now so gaily empty of any "presence" save that of the first sunbeams, he had a twinge almost of remorse for having so thoroughly "exorcised" her. How would she fare now, where would she wander—the passionate earth-bound ghost of the woman who had written that she would "beat her head against the golden pavement and blaspheme until God cast her out again on the red soil that she adored"? For he found himself, in the first hour of a new day, believing in the existence of her bodiless ghost, as firmly as he believed in the ghost within his own flesh.

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He went again to look at her portrait, and again he spoke aloud to it:

"Forgive me," he said, "forgive me that love is stronger than death."

The inscrutable eyes, sweetly, even languidly malicious, held him with their sidelong gaze. From the mere painting of her face there emanated such a suggestion of will, bottomless and indomitable, that he could scarcely credit its submission to any power. And yet—she *had* withdrawn. The surrounding air was as empty of her as though she had never been. He felt it as one feels that one lives. He was there quite alone with the semblance of her body. Her spirit was as utterly absent as though it had retreated to some star in another universe.

With this last emphasising of his first conviction, there leaped in him the triumphant joy of what this would mean to Melany. His experiment, thought of in perplexed desperation, had gloriously succeeded. Even she would feel the fulness of its result, must become aware of the positive, complete banishment of the influence that had so long terrorised her. As if to accent his inner jubilation, he flung wide the shutters, letting in the full effulgence of an East all gold and scarlet. The morning, clear as ice, was like a promise. No shred of mist had been left by the wind, that had also blown away the last softness of Indian Summer. It was like a different world from yesterday's—a world swept and gar-

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nished, fresh and sharp, supremely, cheerfully the world of natural happenings, of the tried, delightful "every day."

But he had scarcely looked on it a moment before he saw something that sent him flying from the place. This was nothing less than the figure of Melany herself, who stood on the terrace, gazing with God knew what apprehension at the window of the room where he had passed the night.

And when he pounced on her like a whirlwind, clasp-  
ing her to him, he found—the touching homeliness of it! —that there was something in her arms already—a Thermos bottle of hot coffee—"In case," she explained between tears and laughter, "you should still be there, you know."

"Ah," cried Radford, unable to keep it back for a quieter disclosure, "it's *she* who's not there!"

And as she looked at him from under the hood of her cloak, trying to make out whether this was one of love's tender lies, he began to draw her towards the house.

"Come . . . if you don't believe me, come and feel for yourself! You'll know . . . the moment you're over the threshold you'll *know*!"

He almost lifted her over, then rushed about, opening the shutters of every window in the hall. The dawn poured in its ruddy light, as if from a huge hearth-stone.

"You feel it? You feel it?" he kept saying.

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He came back to her, looked eagerly into her face, pushing back the hood.

"Can't you almost *see* it?" he repeated. "The emptiness—the clearness she's left."

But he saw that he was bewildering her with his excitement, so he said:

"Never mind—wait a little. Come in here and I'll light a fire, and then we'll drink that coffee you've brought, like a darling seraph! And when you're quite warm and comfy, I'll tell you the whole story. By George! It *is* a story! . . ."

Over that queer meal, than which surely no lovers ever partook of a queerer, in the sunrise that now filled the old room with gay, domestic friendliness, he told her of his night's adventure and its astonishing conclusion. Not till they stood hand in hand before the clock, however, with its enamelled rose replacing the image of Time as Death, did the last shadow slip from her face, leaving it one pale gleam of wondering love.

"And it's *you* who've done this for *me*!" she cried at last, in a voice of soft yet passionate triumph. "Ah, I felt something of what you would do for me, that first day—but I never dreamed of *this*!"

"And yet," said Radford, smiling, "it was that first day I began to love you."

She kept the sweet gravity of her wonder.

"It's all a miracle," she breathed, "a beautiful miracle . . ." Then flushing suddenly: "You're my

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Saviour—and you've turned the waters of Marah into wine for me!"

That evening they told Mr. Warrenger of their engagement, and his unaffected delight added to their joy. He, too, it seemed, had had "a premonition." When, on the following day, Radford, to whom the idea had occurred in the night, disclosed as another surprise which he felt would delight the old man, his intention of buying "*Her Wish*," Mr. Warrenger actually embraced his future son-in-law.

"My dear boy!" he exclaimed. "Now that you've so gallantly proved that that charming old place is not the habitation of spectres, what more could I wish than to see my children's children playing there! Ah, my dear, my fine lad—" he concluded, "you little know what a burden you have lifted from my heart, by bringing happiness to my Melany."

But Melany herself received the news of the intended purchase with one of her most startled looks.

"You want to buy it—for us to *live* in!" she asked.

"I want to give it to *you* as my wedding-gift," answered Radford.

But at this she had all her old, dismayed recoil.

"No, no!" she exclaimed earnestly. "It's you it must belong to,—if you really feel you must have it. To give it to me would . . ." she shivered just as she

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used to before he had "exorcised" the other Melany. "Yes, I am sure it would spoil everything."

"But I thought—except for what's gone now—you loved the old place so dearly?"

"I do love it," she admitted. "It's in my blood to love it—and yet . . ."

"'And yet'?" he prompted.

She gave a perturbed sigh.

"For me to live there . . . wouldn't it be after all—to risk angering her again?"

"My dearest girl," Radford exclaimed buoyantly, "she isn't there to be angered!"

It ended by her leaving it to him, only she wouldn't hear of the deed of purchase being made out in her name, and by the middle of December everything was settled, and "Her Wish" the property of Evan Radford, Esquire, of Buckleigh, Mass.

"You see," he told Melany with a lover's glee, "how much better *I* love *you* than Geoffrey Brown loved *his* Melany! I don't own a rood of land, in New England, except what my father's house stands on, and here I've bought two thousand acres of the red earth of Virginia, just because you love it and sprang from it!"

She had a retort for this, so perfect that it could only be answered by a kiss.

"Ah," she said, "but *I* too love *you* far better than she loved him!—for I love you more than the whole earth and all that's in it!"

## XVIII

AND now began a time of great pleasure for them both. Radford was bent on restoring to "Her Wish," as nearly as possible, the exact guise that it had worn in the height of its prosperity. In order to do this, old furniture had to be hunted up, in Virginia and New York, even in England. On discovering, in one of the letters which filled Mr. Warrenger's bookcase-desk to overflowing, that the spinning-room had been "right tastefully garnished by my daughter Melany, in puce and apple-green sarcenet," nothing would do but that they should procure old stuffs that displayed these colours. A sufficient quantity of material answering more or less this description was found by an antiquity dealer in London to whom Radford wrote, also a charming old set of chairs and a sofa belonging to the period.

When all these different articles began to arrive, so great was Radford's interest, and so keen his desire to make the place into something that would allure Melany into forgetting her old dread, that he took up his quarters in "Her Wish" house. His man, a shrewd, adaptable Belgian named Blanc, had rejoined him, and he engaged by the day such other servants as were necessary for the rougher work.



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He had succeeded in tracing here and there in Virginia a considerable amount of the old Horsemanden silver, and it was a service that had belonged to the first Melany herself that Blanc arranged one afternoon in the spinning-room, against the arrival of his master's *fiancée* to tea.

The afternoon was a biting one towards the first of March, with a low, grey sky that let through gleams of sullen orange, and ground ringing to the tread like metal.

Radford, eager and exhilarated in his part of "host," moved about the room, giving last touches, now to the tea-table, now to the curtains of "puce and apple-green."

Mr. Warrenger was to have come with Melany, to this small housewarming, but when Radford looked from the window for at least the tenth time, he saw that she was mounting the front portico alone. He went to meet her, and she explained that a twinge of lumbago had kept her father, at the last moment, greatly to his disappointment. Much as Radford liked the old gentleman, he wasn't at all averse from having Melany quite to himself on such an occasion.

Telling Blanc that he would ring if he needed anything, he led the girl in triumph along the corridor to the rooms that had once been haunted—and, for her, so terribly haunted.

The breakfast-room charmed her with its old chintzes and china, but when he pushed aside the curtain from

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the doorway leading to the spinning-room, she gave a little gasp of admiration. It would truly have been hard to imagine anything more lovely than this room had now become, with its *ameublement* as in a picture by John Morland, and the faded Aubusson carpet that seemed literally to strew her way with flowers. A bright fire burned on the hearth, the tea-kettle chirruped like a fantastic bird.

"Oh," she cried, "you've made it look *happy* as well as beautiful! I never thought it could look to me like this!" And as she went towards the tea-table, she told him prettily that it was a lover's thought to put flowers under her feet in March.

"Yes, but I meant to have real flowers for you too," he said regretfully. "Only Blanc assures me he's 'phoned twice to the station, and they've certainly not come. There, however," he ended, brightening with a glance at the old clock, "is *the* rose—our rose of assurance which can't fade."

She followed his look, her hand on the silver kettle where the other Melany's hand had so often rested.

"It's like a fairy tale," she said pensively. "Who would believe it!"

"It's our fairy tale and we believe it, and that's enough, isn't it?" he smiled, bending to kiss her hand.

"That's everything," she murmured.

"And to the very end," he continued gaily, "it will

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be a perfect fairy tale, for we're going to 'live happy ever after.' "

"My own love—my dear love," the girl whispered, laying her hand on his shoulder as he knelt beside her, "I'm so afraid the gods, or the fairies," she smiled a little uncertainly, "will get jealous—for one oughtn't to worship a mortal, you see!"

"Ah, have you ever read the English Marriage Service?" Radford asked. "There's one lovely thing at least in it—'With my body I thee worship.' And that's how I love you too, my dearest."

He paled suddenly, and she thought it was with love for her, so her eyelids drooped to hide their dark delight, and further to conceal it she began to pour the hot water from the kettle upon the tea-leaves in the little silver pot. The smoky fragrance of Souchong rose warmly, but there was a stronger fragrance in the room that overpowered it—at least for him.

He got to his feet, and went and stood near the fire, glancing about the room, and then at her. Very composedly, with the sure, graceful movements that he loved, she was pouring more water into the teapot, having waited a moment for the tea to "brew," and with her other hand arranging the cups and sugar-basin more to her convenience. There was no slightest sign, on her grave yet happy face, that she was aware of anything unusual.

Yet that perfume grew and grew. It was exactly as

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if some one with a great armful of freshly gathered damask roses had entered the room, as if—and now, had Melany been looking at him, his pallor would surely have startled her—as if this some one had drawn near the fire and were standing close to him, while the heat of the flames drew forth the perfume of the roses that she held, until he could have sworn the blossoms almost touched his face.

*"Le thé est servi, Monsieur,"* the girl called gaily, and held out a smoking cup to him.

Radford took it from her, and stood stirring it, his eyes on her face, with what she suddenly observed was a rather strange look.

"What is it?" she asked quickly. "What are you thinking of?"

He smiled with an effort, and said, "Nothing much. I was only wondering if Blanc hadn't made a mistake about the roses I ordered—if they hadn't come after all, you know, and got left about somewhere in the box. We've unpacked such a lot of boxes to-day—he might have got confused. I think I'll just ring and ask him."

He pulled the cord of an old-fashioned bell near the chimney as he spoke. They could hear its faint tinkle somewhere far away. Melany, sipping her tea contentedly, gave him a little glance and headshake over the cup.

"Take care!" she smiled. "You mustn't spoil me *too* much. The fairies *are* jealous of mortals."

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Blanc had appeared at the door.

"*Monsieur a sonné?*" he inquired.

Radford explained that it had occurred to him that one of the underservants might have put the box of flowers somewhere and forgotten it—perhaps in this room.

"*Ici, Monsieur?*" asked the man, looking blankly about.

"*Oui; c'est ce que j'ai dit,*" said Radford with some impatience. "*Dans une de ces armoires, peut-être,*" he ended, pointing to one of the corner-cupboards.

"*Mais pardon, Monsieur, elles sont toutes vides,*" Blanc replied, and opened them in succession to prove his statement.

"*Bien,*" said Radford. "*Alors, c'est tout. Merci.*"

Blanc went out with a correctly expressionless face (his ideal was to resemble as closely as possible a *valet anglais*), but his Gallic heart felt sympathy for his master, who was evidently so much in love that this *faute d'arriver* of an offering to his lady made him pale as over some really tragic event.

"You dear!" cried Melany when Blanc had gone, laughing softly. "One would think those flowers were a necklace of rubies!"

"I hate to fail in anything I try to do for you," he said in a low voice, turning and going over again to the fire.

The scent of roses, which had somewhat died away,

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came wafting near again—nearer—now warm as with the flames; he could almost feel the *effleurement* of their petals. He gazed at the enamelled rose upon the clock. Was it possible that in some unheard-of way it distilled this living fragrance? He leaned closer. No. Its enamelled petals were quite scentless; and suddenly, for the first time, he felt that presence, so often described to him by the girl, now quite unconscious of it—a presence as real as her own—near him, near enough, indeed, to be just not touching him. He could not have told what precisely were his sensations—excitement, an unsuppressible curiosity, the queerest flattered emotion as of one “singled out,” but most of all dread for Melany—his Melany, who sat there so unconscious sipping her cup of tea. It *must* penetrate to her finally, this wonderful, fresh, honeyed yet pungent fragrance. . . . And then . . . ? He simply couldn’t face what this “then” might hold for them both.

And he was helpless; for if he suggested that they should go, she would at once suspect something. He could not even propose, with an effect of naturalness, a turn through the gardens that he had begun to restore, for a bleak wind with the edge of a chipped razor was tearing through the shrubbery and the sun had withdrawn even those dull tatters of orange which had been gleaming when she came.

But how, then, was he to “go on”? In that presence he felt awkward, ill at ease as though one should con-

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template "making love" in the presence of a third person alive and visibly mocking.

Somehow he felt sure that "*she*" was mocking him—not fiendishly at all, but with a quiet sense of amusement in her power over him.

She certainly had power over him to the extent of making him feel rigid and unnatural. He glanced at one of the empty chairs near the hearth. He imagined her so vividly—seated in it, the roses across her lap, her black, sweetly malicious eyes fastened on him with a sort of lazy triumph—that for an instant it was almost as if he had actually seen her there.

But what—in the name of all that was most eerie!—did it mean, this sudden manifestation of herself to him, while shutting out—as she was indubitably doing—the girl whom she had formerly so tormented? What, then, was the real message of the rose, that he had read so differently? Was it the oddest instance that surely had ever happened, of mischievous, spritish trickery—or had it meant some other thing? Was it still before him to "have it out with her"?

One of the strangest facts about the whole impression—and all these thoughts which take so long to record in written words had come to him during a moment in quick flashes—was the fact that his sense of her being there wasn't in the least gruesome. If a man who believed in fairies were to think that Melusine wearing the cap of invisibility had drawn near him, he would

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feel much as Radford felt. All that could be called an approach to gruesomeness in the extraordinary experience was his sense of the dreadful danger—as she would think it—of this presence so close to Melany, and yet of which she remained so totally unaware.



## XIX

**I**N spite, however, of his feeling no fear at this perfumed manifestation—she had certainly a charming way of announcing her presence!—a chill had come over his mood. He could not have kept up the tone with which he had welcomed Melany, if both their lives had depended on it. That embarrassment as of a lover under the cynical regard of a third person, paralysed all spontaneity; and he was relieved beyond words when Melany herself solved his dilemma by asking him to “show her over the house—everything that he had been doing.”

The strange fragrance did not follow them from the room, but the spell that it had laid upon him lingered all during Melany's visit, and even after he had walked home with her, in the orange light that had flared again at sunset.

He returned earlier to “Her Wish” that evening than was his custom. He felt the need of being alone, of threshing out for himself the peculiar riddle of this wilful unexpected return.

He sat long in the room where he had held his vigil four months ago—a room now one of the pleasantest in the house, with its fire-drawn scent of old leather bindings, its time-toned rugs and damask draperies; and he

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came to the conclusion that, after all, in a way, "she" had kept the compact suggested by the rose. She had not revealed her presence to Melany. He was still, as he had said he would always be, "between them." But this very fact was just what was so perplexing. For what, then, had she come again? Was it for something that only a living being could do for her—that *he* could do for her? Some question he could answer—some assuagement of her wilful spirit by an act done in accordance with its wishes?

The old desire to come into closer contact with her—to see, to hear if possible—was upon him stronger than ever. After all, there was no disloyalty to *his* Melany in this desire. Since he hadn't been able to "exorcise" the other as completely as he had thought at first, what choice was there between weakly submitting to a vague *hantise*, and seeking, or rather willing—since he didn't in the least know how to "seek" such a thing—a more explicit revelation? If she would only make known to him her purpose, the object that she must have, in her strange return. . . .

He rose finally, and went to the spinning-room. It was still warm, though the fire had died into ashes. He re-kindled it himself, not caring to call Blanc for such a service at that time of night, and sat there in the firelight until one o'clock, waiting, hoping—in the end eagerly longing—for some sign of her presence.

None came. The perfume of roses had entirely dis-

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solved. There was no faintest inkling of anything beyond the personality of an unusual room accentuated by firelight.

But a week later, to the day, something occurred which at the time quite overcame him.

Melany had just left that afternoon for a visit to a cousin who lived in New York. They were to be married in May, and she had gone to make certain purchases for her *trousseau*. He returned from accompanying her to the station, and entered "Her Wish" at that hour before the lamps are lighted, when the dusk is most confusing to one who has just come in from the brighter atmosphere without.

When he was half-way up the curve of the main stair, he became suddenly aware of that perfume of damask roses. The next instant, drawn swiftly, delicately across his face, he felt the contact of the flowers themselves. He stood stock still, petrified by that soft but terrific touch of something that was unreal yet tangible—petrified all but his heart, which gave one sick bound, then beat to suffocation.

And as he stood there, he seemed to hear light feet running up the stair before him. What he *did* hear, beyond all question of his dismayed senses, was, in the far distance above, a laugh, faint but clear, ascending a little scale then stopping short.

He found himself later in his room, not at all remembering how he had got there, lighting with a hand that

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shook, the lamp beside his bed. When, a moment after, Blanc tapped at the door, having come for a like purpose, he could just summon enough naturalness of voice to say that he didn't wish anything; yet such was his craving—a craving as apart from his will as thirst or hunger—for the nearness of some human creature, that he had to make a prodigious effort, not to call the man back, when he heard his footsteps dying away along the passage.

He had wished to see, to hear; but this unspeakable, actual contact with something thrust as from a fourth-dimensional fulness,—a “plenum” such as the ancients spoke of and through which living beings moved unaware, themselves like phantoms to the subtler yet more real essence of its denizens—*this* he had not bargained for. As to that, he had not “bargained” for anything; there was no agreement, tacit or explicit, between him and the being who had so inexplicably selected him for what he could only think of as her mocking experiment. Indeed, the more he reflected on it, the more it struck him as being an experiment on her part, of just how far she could penetrate the dense veils of non-consciousness that screened off his grosser everyday world from her more rarefied but as real sphere.

As this conviction gained possession of him, he became also aware of an immense curiosity closely knit with a shrinking equally great. He had read enough about such matters and discussed them sufficiently with men

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of undoubted standing in the scientific world, to know that they were often attended by danger, even by horrors, when pushed to the extreme of the brink on which he stood. And he brooded with wonder on the fact that the light touch of a ghostly flower in the darkness had filled him with more consternation than the coiling of a real snake would have done—there had been in it something as of a sinister coquetry that was more appalling than the rudest violence.

One profound, unmixed feeling emerged at last out of all this inner turmoil—the feeling of thankfulness for Melany's absence. He would have three weeks to himself in which to think out—fight out, if necessary—his way to a rational solution of his really unparalleled plight. He felt it to be quite without its equivalent in any history of the kind that he could recall, modern or ancient, because of his position between the woman he loved and the phantom of the woman who, for whatever cause, hated her so implacably. He still, however, had also his first feeling of being able to cope with her, "ward her off," as he had said.

Somehow, even in the recoil of all that was most normal in him, from this latest manifestation of the imperious will that had survived even death, he had no fear of what she might do to him personally.

It was chiefly his failure to imagine even dimly her object in thus revealing herself to him more and more,

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while, as it were, insulating Melany from all perception of her, that disturbed him most.

What shock and horror might she not be preparing to spring, like some ghostly beast out of the jungle of that dim "other world," straight at the breast of his love?

As he walked to and fro in his bedroom, engrossed with his effort to solve what was only too plainly an unsolvable riddle, a phrase of Melany's darted into his mind. . . . "To propitiate her. . . ."

He caught at it—held it, scrutinising it from every side. "To propitiate her. . . ." Certainly if one could, that would be a way out. To placate her—send her "back" satisfied, before the other returned. More and more he felt sure that her persistent presence meant that there was still something in this world, this particular combination of grosser elements, that she desired, or at least wished to control.

Before going to sleep that night he had fully made up his mind not, for the present, to resist her in any way; on the contrary, to lend himself, by a quiescent attitude, to her evident desire for a clearer, more intelligible intercourse.

## XX

**H**IS was now the attitude of mind in which a man "buried," as one says, in an obscure, lonely place, awaits tidings by wireless of some weighty event on which his whole future depends. He could not dispel his restlessness by long rides and walks; for by leaving "Her Wish" for such extended periods he would be lessening his chances of coming more quickly into closer relations with the personality that seemed as wilfully erratic in its present form as it had been when living. Even the hours that he felt it necessary to spend with Melany's father were a great drain on his nervous force. It was so hard to keep up his accustomed tone of light-hearted gaiety, as became a happy bridegroom-elect.

One day, as he was returning jaded and downcast after one of these visits, a thought came to him, quite overwhelming in the simple commonplace solution of the whole thing that it offered. He was astounded that it hadn't come to him before. It was merely the realisation of the fact that no one who had bought "Her Wish" had been able to live there a year. Might not this be her sole object—to drive him away as she had driven the "Brooklyn person" and his successors? One thing was

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certain, that if she continued to pursue him he couldn't continue to live at "Her Wish." . . . If he could only convey to her by some means his perfect willingness to give it up, and then see whether her arbitrary, fitful visitations would cease.

He rode his horse to the stables and dismounted there, returning to the house on foot. The day was very mild, full of that subtle stir and hidden life—the mounting of sap in the yellowing stems of willows, the soft push of crocus buds—that is as if Spring had turned in her sleep. His walk led him by the little court where the fountain now gushed again, and he stopped to watch a cardinal-bird that was drinking from it. Then seeing that a bluebird and some sparrows were waiting their turn in a tree nearby, he sat down on the bench under the spinning-room window—yielding to the happy charm that birds always had for him.

The hour was sunlit and very still; yet he had sat there but a few moments before he was aware that this stillness had increased in some extraordinary manner that seemed to affect even the birds on the fountain-brim. They stopped drinking, darted their heads uneasily, were suddenly gone. And the stillness grew and grew until there was in it a sense of suffocation.

Under some impulse, probably akin to that which had made the birds take such quick flight, he sprang away from the bench, and turned, facing the window.

She was there—the elusive, the amazing phantom—



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there as any realest woman might have been—leaning lightly on the window-sill—her marvellous hair shining in the sunlight—her black eyes fixed on him with a look that had in it mockery, amusement, conscious power—ah, such power, and such consciousness of it!—and, yes,—he was not dreaming, nor was he mad,—coquetry—the same incredible, breath-taking coquetry there had been in the light stroke of those spectral roses across his cheek.

It was fixed in his mind forever, how a little tendril of her red hair stirred in the breeze that rose like a sigh from the utter stillness, then died away.

He stood staring, incapable of speech, incapable even of thought—given up to the astounding sensation of the moment, as a spent swimmer gives himself up to the overwhelming sea. And there came to him from her, not as the old Quaker said of Cromwell “a waft of death,” but a “waft of life” so thrillingly abundant that in the living world about them it was not she, but all the rest, that seemed what men call “dead.”

Still he stood there, held by that dark, ineluctable gaze, shut in with her, as it were, by the weird stillness as of an eclipse, which seemed to have hushed all the innumerable vague murmurings of everyday, leaving them cut off as on an island of silence.

Little by little—like a half awakened sleeper who struggles to recall clearly a magic dream, but cannot possess himself of any circumstance that befell in it, only

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of the vague, enchanted atmosphere that has drifted with him into wakefulness—little by little, through the spell that numbed him, he grasped weakly the conviction that what the window now framed it had framed often before; that he was not looking for the first time on that matchless perverse loveliness, but had marvelled before at it, standing where he now stood. I have called it a "conviction," but it was scarcely that—rather a mystic apperception which had come to him through what Giordano Bruno called "the flower of the mind."

And as it brushed him with its evanescent thrill of something apprehended but not understood—she smiled.

He saw then, not only the miracle of a faulty mouth turned into perfect beauty by the curves of a smile, but received from its mute eloquence a message plain as words.

"Foolish man," it said, with its soft yet proud indulgence, "I come to do *you* a favour, not to crave one from you!"

As if she had cried it to him, he started, broke as from the loosened clutch of ether, into his normal consciousness. But at his first step forward, she withdrew into the room beyond, yet as she went, turned on him over her shoulder the sweet malice of sidelong eyes, in which the smile that had faded from her lips still lingered.

He saw distinctly the wave backward of the long scarf or kerchief that she wore, and which until then

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he had not noticed. It was not rose-coloured but of a dim, tender green like the flecks on snowdrops. He sprang recklessly to the window, but only in time to catch a last gleam from the marvellous hair, as she passed into the next room between the curtains of the doorway that fell together again, swaying a little just as though some living woman had passed through them.

Without pausing to think or reason, he swung himself over the low sill as he had done on the day the other Melany, *his* Melany, had spun for him, and ran in the direction the phantom had taken. But there was no glimpse of her, either in the next room or the corridor beyond—only that densely sweet fragrance of just-gathered roses, that faded as he ran on, guided by it, out of the house, down the path toward the rose-garden, until it died quite away in the mild, sunlit air.

He stopped then, and feeling all at once curiously light and faint, threw himself on the grass, his hands under his head, his eyes fixed on the serene, pale blue of the March sky, as if needing to look up into unmeasured heights after having run giddily along the brink of an abyss as unmeasured. Yes, he had just that swimming faintness of one who has been leaning above a huge gulf with not so much as a cobweb between him and an ultimate plunge into nothingness.

This sensation was distinctly a repercussion from the numb trance which had been his state while actually looking on her, meeting the inflexible, ineluctable gaze

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of those black eyes; had been latent in his spellbound wonder; and now that the whole miraculous happening was over, leaped up quivering in him like a spring released.

He lay there gazing upward into the calm blueness, until it dazzled with swarms of little crystalline globules, then closed his eyes, feeling that he closed in with them a secret that he did not wish to share with the bland candour of that daylight blue. It was the secret of his strange spiritual vertigo, put into words. He knew now that what his dizziness had consisted of was a mingling of horror and fascination: of horror that he couldn't analyse, but that was somehow made sweet by the wildness, the dual irresistible quality of the fascination that accompanied it. It was as if, out of his own being, his own substance, the exquisite spectre had created her visible body; as if this part of himself in her drew him towards that which he had sensed afterwards as a measureless abyss.

The mountaineer's words, uttered on the night when he had first heard the minor hum of her spinning-wheel, came back to him.

"I felt as if she could draw me up through those shutters like water." That was it—"like water". . . as if the soul, the quintessential part of himself had flowed towards her like water . . . as if his secret self had been a spring deep buried and she had held towards him a divining-rod of magic hazel. . . .

## XXI

WHEN he had recovered from the state of queer, almost lightheaded exhaustion that had followed his first encounter with her visible seeming, he pondered with a more normal outlook on its significance.

That strange message that her smile had sent to him over the impalpable threads that certainly stretched between them, puzzled him more and more. What favour could she, in the name of all things sane and blessed, have it in her power to bestow upon him? Wasn't the greatest favour possible to imagine that she could do him, just the withdrawal of herself across the border that separated his commonplace world from her inconceivable one? And yet, as he thought this, he was conscious of a desire to see her if only once again; to have with his vision of her a more complete understanding of its object—to have her express it to him, with that strange telepathic silence, quite fully.

He could not now, recalling the fact but not his sensation at the time, make out why there had been "horror" in his feeling, for her look, while mocking, had not been malevolent. What had struck him as the "sweet malice" of even her pictured eyes had been only

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the malice of one who knows an extraordinary secret, withheld from others but that concerns them. This expression had been also in the long look she had given him from the window, but it had no threat in it, no hostility.

As the days and nights went by with no further sign from her, until almost another week had gone, his nervous tension grew to such a pitch that he felt as if a slow fever were harassing him. He could not bear it, he felt, if before Melany's return he had not come to some definite adjustment of the incredible affair. She would read the strangeness of his mind in her first glance at him; she would question, she would suffer all sorts of doubts and fears. To confess to her would be to bring back, redoubled, all the torment from which he had striven to save her.

He had reached the point now where he sometimes spoke aloud, when he was alone and sure no one would overhear, trying to penetrate with his physical voice the silent impalpability with which she, that other Melany, had wrapped herself

"For God's sake . . . in God's name," he would say, "come and make me know *what* it is that you want . . . I am not afraid . . . Come *now* . . . *here* . . ."

And only the silence flowing gently about the usual homely sounds of everyday, within and without the old house, would answer him.

When but five days lay between him and the time of

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his Melany's return, he felt justified in excusing himself from his visits to Hilton, under the plea of a recurrence of the malarial fever from which he had once suffered. He did indeed look rather ill, so much so that Blanc ventured to suggest one morning:

*"Pardon, Monsieur, mais si Monsieur consentirait à voir un médecin? Monsieur a besoin d'un tonique quelconque . . . j'en suis sûr."*

Radford, with an irritability that convinced the man still more of his master's need of a doctor, replied by advising Blanc not to be an *imbécile* and declaring that it was precisely this particular morning that he happened to be feeling much better.

That day he spent much of his time in the spinning-room. It seemed to him as if here she might be able to manifest herself more easily, and though he had near him some books that he wished to look over, and a packet of neglected letters, he found that he couldn't concentrate his attention sufficiently either to read or write.

As he sat there turning the wheel of his monotonous thought, which would only revolve about that one subject, he found himself gazing at the beautifully inlaid writing-desk in which had been found her last letter to Geoffrey Branton. It had been removed from her bed-chamber and placed here with the other objects that had belonged to her; he had gone through it once, to see whether it were quite empty, but he had never examined it meticulously, and now the thought came to him

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that perhaps there might be some drawer, even a "secret compartment," that he had overlooked.

How strange it would be to find a scrap of her handwriting, something perhaps that might bring her nearer, that he might construe into a message! At all events the search would help to pass this heavy interval of waiting.

He rose and went over to the desk, determined that this time no nook or cranny should be left unexplored. The drawers in it seemed innumerable, those at the top bearing the names of the different months, spelled quaintly, as, "Aprill," "Novbr," etc. The lower half was shut in by doors, that when opened disclosed a labyrinth of little compartments and still other drawers.

After a half-hour spent in minute examination, he suddenly felt a rounded unevenness in the wood back of a small drawer that he had quite pulled out. He pressed hard on this unevenness with his thumb, his heart quickening nervously, and was rewarded by no less a sight than the "secret compartment" he had conjectured. Now his heart beat with a vengeance! He slipped in his hand and felt about in the darkness—for the compartment was so far back that he couldn't see its contents. There was something there . . . something soft like fine velvet.

Taking it out, he saw that it was a glove—a woman's glove of soft undressed buckskin, having embroidered on its back, in tarnished gilt, a sprig of broom.



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He spread it out upon his own palm and sat gazing at it, his blood ruffled as under a chill breeze blowing from that other world where the hand that had worn it now was—the hand that could yet touch and dispose objects as it willed, in this material world where he was immovably fixed. It must have been indeed a lovely hand that this glove had covered, long and slight as the idealised hands of Van Dyck . . .

Why, he wondered, had she shut the glove away there in that hidden place? Even as he wondered, however, he felt that he knew. It must have been a love-token that she had given Branton in the early days of their betrothal, and then demanded from him when they parted. Some softness in the adamant of her strange nature had kept her from destroying the poor *gage d'amour*, but her implacable pride had winced from the sight of it, and so she had hidden it away in that secure darkness, where it had lain for over a hundred years.

As he sat gazing at it, there stole over him the most uncanny sensation of being in closer contact with her than even this movingly personal fragment could have produced. It was almost as if she were touching him—the poignant invisibility! He recalled that impression of his first visit to the “ghost garden”—that feeling as of rose-scented hair blowing against him—and at the same time there flashed in him the conviction that this glove was not a mere, empty sheath—that it con-

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tained something still more personal—a relic even more closely intimate than itself . . .

He slipped his fingers into the full gauntlet and upward towards the palm. They touched a flat, silken object. Withdrawing it, he saw that it was a little packet of the thin, antique silk called "sareenet."

Curiously elated, his pulses quickening again, he put aside the glove, and unfolded the faded silk. What lay before him then, coiled round and round upon itself like a lovely, ruby-coloured snake, was a tress of the finest, longest, reddest hair conceivable, dulled a little as by the breath of time . . .

That night Blanc was more than ever disturbed over his master's condition, for he would eat no dinner, and though he retired early he did not go to bed. The astute Belgian, whose real devotion to Radford made him rather a Peeping Tom at times, crept to his door as late as twelve o'clock, and heard him restlessly pacing to and fro. He did not dare knock at such an hour, but shaking his head forebodingly, went back to his own quarters, determined that next day he would make a clean breast of his anxiety to "*ce bon vieux, M. Varrangère.*"

At one o'clock, Radford, quite worn out with the strain of unfulfilled expectancy, laid the glove with its beautiful, funereal contents, on the little table beside his bed.

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The nights were still cold, though April had come with largesse of fruit-tree bloom and lilac blossom so profuse that it swayed down the branches with plumes triple-clustered like Prince of Wales's feathers.

Radford had kept up the fire in his bedroom, by stopping now and then in his nervous roving to throw on a handful of pine cones or a bit of apple-wood. Now, at one o'clock, it had dwindled into a bed of coals, on which he placed a bough or two, before undressing. Somehow the fire kept him from feeling so drearily, so—he had to confess it—apprehensively alone. And he lay in the huge bed—which had been one of the original articles of furniture left in "Her Wish"—with wide open eyes, watching the play of light and shadow on the white ceiling, thinking how as a boy he had loved the winter because it gave him that solace at night, and almost wishing that he were a boy again. At least he had been free from such experiences as now wrung him, though even then—he recalled with a pale smile its spectral toy-like woolliness—a ghost had appeared to him. Ah, if she only *would* appear, and have done with it! . . .

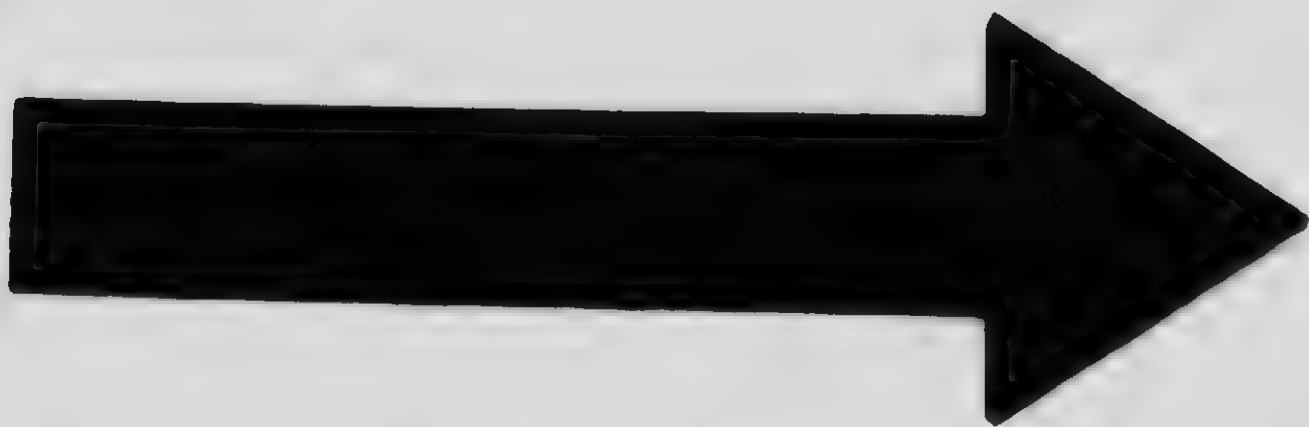
He was drifting off on the first soft current of sleep, when a rustling in the old chintz hangings that hung about the head of the bed, roused him. He had seen a mouse run up them once in the daytime, and he had almost a woman's aversion from mice. He was about

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to spring up, when something caught his eye, that made him lie still as though seized by catalepsy.

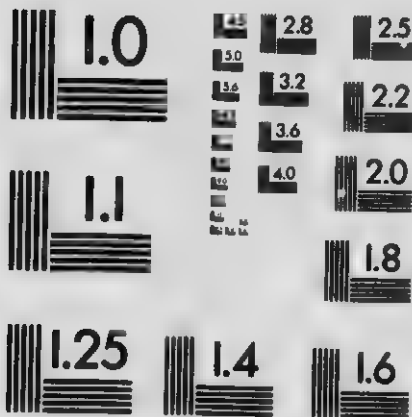
Stealing slowly, delicately around the edge of the curtain, which was held out from the bed by a gilded rod, came a woman's hand. He could see from beneath his half-lowered lids—which he dared neither to lift nor to close wholly, so great was his breathless desire to lie motionless—the fine whiteness of its texture in the brilliant firelight, and the gloss of the nails like pale coral. Softly, cautiously, it emerged, till the supple roundness of the wrist was revealed, then the curve of a lissom arm. This hand, exaggeratedly lovely as in Van Dyck's idealisations, reached slowly towards him—oh, how slowly!—touched the table, pausing an instant, then creeping across it with a wary, questing touch, nearer ever nearer to his face as it lay with its gelid look of a death-mask, clay-white on the white pillow.

He could not have moved though one had come to seal him in a coffin and bury him living in the earth. He could not move or cry out, and yet he knew that if that small hand touched him he would die. It was not in mortal man to endure that touch and live. And still it crept nearer, delicately, almost cunningly; and with it stole an exquisite fragrance of dewy roses. The skin of his cheek contracted as though at the approach of a searing-iron,—his heart seemed pressed between splinters of ice,—ice like powdered glass filled his veins. It



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was death—death by sheer, unutterable, unnamable terror that was approaching him with the soft approach of that perfectly beautiful slender hand. Then, as he thought its touch was upon him—as there was a sick swing of all his frozen consciousness towards the depth of some measureless abyss—as softly as it had stolen towards him it began to withdraw, slowly, delicately, with little questing movements that he could feel upon the pillow, until once more it rested on the table.

Then he realised. It was for that lock of her hair she had come. The wild surge of his blood as he thought this, gave him the pang with which sensation returns to those who have been half-frozen. His heart laboured so loudly that he was sick again for fear she would hear it. But as if some benign influence had intervened to keep him from death or madness, he saw the slight fingers suddenly dart and close with a grip as of passion, on the silken packet.

Now there was no more slowness. The white hand had pounced like a white hawk—it was as quickly withdrawn. He heard light steps, no longer cautious, go rapidly to the door, pass through it, and die away along the hall. . . . Ignominiously he swooned into such abject depths of human weakness that the dawn was white upon the ceiling when he regained consciousness.

The next afternoon, still lying languidly in the bed that had indeed been a “bed of anguish” for him, he yielded to the combined entreaties of Blanc and

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"Monsieur Varrangère," whom the Belgian had desperately sought out and implored to come to his assistance with a master who was at once very ill and very "entêté." A doctor was sent for and arrived within an hour—an intelligent "country doctor" who pronounced Radford to be suffering either from nervous shock or a sudden collapse from overwork. When Mr. Warrenger explained that his future son-in-law was a painter, and had come to Virginia for a rest, after an unusually arduous year of artistic labour, Dr. Borridge looked enlightened. "Then that's it, sure as sin," said he. "These artist fellows are always burning their brains at both ends. Painting still in imagination, that's what's settled him."

He forbade Radford to think of any subject even remotely connected with his art, and left a powerful heart and nerve tonic in the grateful care of Blanc.

Radford had been quite willing to see the man of medicine, for he had presupposed a tonic of some sort, just as Blanc had, and for what his spirit was evidently to be called on more and more to endure, his body certainly needed, as Mr. Warrenger expressed it, "bolstering up."

After only two doses of the stuff he felt much stronger, and it was with a huge relief, but a mortification equally great at his own lack of "stamina" (the doctor's word), that he heard Blanc moving about in the next room where he had taken up his quarters for the night.



## XXII

BY the next day he felt almost himself again, though to his own eyes in the mirror perceptibly thinner and paler than he had been two weeks ago. Blanc was ordered protesting to return to his former room in the back of the house.

"*Mais, Monsieur,*" he pleaded. "*Monsieur a encore l'air très souffrant . . .*"

"*Vous m'agacez enfin,*" his master had retorted, "*avec votre air de vieille femme qui renifle la mort!*"

The man had muttered with devoted impertinence as he went shrugging to do as he was told:

"*C'est peut-être que Monsieur me rappelle un squelette, tant il a maigri ces derniers jours!*"

But although Radford had regained outwardly his normal poise, he was inwardly still vibrating with what he had felt as the unendurably close approach of that from which by nature man is set furthest apart.

The emotion that had seized him when he looked on that wonderful tress of hair—the sense, when touching it, that in some occult way he was touching *her*—was as nothing compared to that dissolving of the very spirit within him when he had feared that her hand—living

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again, with a life so like and so unlike the life by which he lived—was about to touch *him!* . . .

And he wondered—half stupefied by the vanity of all conjecture in regard to such a thing—why she should have come so secretly, in such overwhelmingly human guise, to take it from him. Was it that in some mysterious way her power to reveal herself in the actual world was interwoven with those shining strands that had once been so exquisitely a part of her earthly self? Had she feared that he might destroy them? Or, perhaps, would their possession have given him some hold on her? Some power to draw her nearer than she cared to come? He had for this an inward shudder oddly mingled with a sense of the well-nigh ludicrous superfluity of any such fear on her part. And the shudder renewed itself as he remembered that touch of ghostly roses on his cheek. . . .

The chief result of these vain musings was a conviction that whatever had been *her* object, *his* object, now and always, must be to keep his will ready to his need, like a sword.

With his breakfast there arrived a letter from Melany that said she would be unavoidably detained for another week. He felt as if he had been lightened of at least half of the strange burden laid upon him. With a whole week more before him he *must* be able to arrive at some definite conclusion of the preposterous matter. And he must not shirk a single issue. If, as he now felt, it was

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to be his will against her will, no other being's will could help him. The nearness of his servant, for instance, at night, would only delay things. What he wanted was to quicken, to precipitate them.

Yet though he gave her every opportunity, by remaining alone for hours, both within and without the house, there was for two whole days no intimation of her presence. He decided, on the third day, to go down into the rose-garden at sunset, to go and stand beside the grave over which by now the grass must be green as emerald. He had always avoided doing this, hating the idea that connects the escaped spirit with its dust. But he had sent for something that he wished to place there—an armful of roses as near the type of the old damask rose as was now produced. Perhaps, after all, it was only that lock of hair that she had come for, and having obtained possession of it was now content. His offering of her favourite flowers was to be half propitiatory, half in recognition of what might prove her final withdrawal. She had given him as a sign, a rose. These roses would be his sign to her, of comprehension and good-will.

The grave, as he had imagined it, was beautifully green; but as he stood looking down on it, he felt that, whether growing on a grave or on a hillside, there is nothing more exquisitely melancholy than the first grass of spring stirring gently under light airs. He laid his roses on it, and was turning to come away, when he saw

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something swaying to and fro in one of the rose-trees, now in fresh leaf, that hung above it. He thought at first that it was an oriole's nest, that most delicately swung cradle in the world, but on parting the branches he saw it to be a glove—a slender glove of undressed buckskin, which had caught on one of the thorns by a gilt thread of its embroidery.

Somehow, he could not have been much more startled had a pale hand emerged from the grave itself, as if to draw closer its emerald coverlet. There was in all these ghostly procedures something so erratic, so capriciously without apparent reason. Why, in Heaven's name—and Heaven's name was one he used often in those days, as if it were a protective amulet—why, in the name of all that there must be of logic even in the actions of one under the sway of subtler laws—should she have taken away the glove, to forget it there on a rose-bush over her own grave? And if she had not forgotten it, for what earthly or unearthly reason had she left it there?

Detaching it from the thorn, he looked to see if the lock of hair were still within it. The glove was empty: of that splendid, ruddy tress there remained not even a strand. . . .

Suddenly there swept over him a quite different sort of fear from any that he had yet felt; not exactly the fear of madness, but the fear that he might be the prey of nervous hallucination. He remembered in that moment

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having read, years ago, a little book on "Demonology" by Sir Walter Scott, and especially a story in it of an hallucinated man who saw phantoms and even heard them speak—a touch more than *he* had yet experienced, thank God! Somehow he felt that it would be far worse to be the enfeebled victim of such illusions than to suffer a terrible, but real, extension of vision and perception beyond the normal powers of man.

This glove was real enough at all events, and yet might he not have dreamed the whole thing? He had walked in his sleep sometimes as a boy—mightn't he have walked to this very spot, in his sleep, and hung the glove there himself? He placed it finally in the inner pocket of his coat, and, taking the shortest way back to the house, went up the stone steps and entered the Maze. It struck him all at once that the air was stifling between these dark walls of evergreen, and that a heavy stillness saturated them like rain. It was when he had reached the heart of the labyrinth that, turning one of its abrupt angles between the high enclosing walls, he came face to face with her. She was standing about five yards away from him, with her head thrown back a little and one foot advanced. In the intensity of her steady gaze there was a difference. Ineluctable and proud as ever, it yet contained also a sort of imperious pleading, as it were a prayer that was half a command—a prayer to him for something that he possessed and yet was hers by an inalienable right.

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With eyes held fast to hers, he could see at the same time, from head to foot, the tall perfection of the figure, in its dim green draperies—the delicate half-bare arms straightened among the folds, with slight hands clenched as if to help the intensity of her deep-diving stare.

And he had again that appalling sense of being poised on the brink of a measureless abyss. It was as if the black eyes wailed to him:

*"De profundis . . . ! De profundis . . . !"*

Now came the curious lightness—as if he stood on air—as if the power of her look was all that held him suspended above gulfs as dark and fathomless as her eyes . . .

He broke, drenched with cold sweat by the terrible effort, from the bands of silence that held him vice-like.

"In God's name, what is it that you want!" he cried aloud—and was alone with the quiet afterglow in the narrow walled passage.

With the strange feeling of exhaustion upon him that he had before experienced—as if she had drawn her visible seeming from the subtler substance of his body—he managed to regain the house and lie down upon a lounge in the library. He had failed in his supreme effort to communicate with her directly, but he was conscious that she too had failed in some effort directed toward him and that was also supreme. It was as if she had abandoned another method for this that she had just tried,

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and seeing its failure had leaped back across the boundary over which he could not follow.

He tried to puzzle out her meaning and was overwhelmed in the midst of his vain endeavour, by the most profound sleep that had come to him in many a day.

He woke from it refreshed and calm. The thought that woke with him was in itself invigorating: "My will is as strong as hers. At least I can prevent her from advancing on me, obsessing me, when I summon all my will to my aid."

But remembering that look, half of prayer, half of command, and how it had seemed to cry to him, "*De profundis!*" a great pity wrung him. It was as if he had failed himself as well as her in summoning all his will to his own aid instead of to hers. Yet when he remembered that unspeakable vertigo of the spirit—which was like the dread of a bodiless consciousness, shrinking from suction into the inmost vacuum of lightless space—he felt that he had acted from blind instinct as a man half etherised fights for breath.

As, after this, nights and days succeeded each other calmly, uneventfully, with a normal commonplaceness that he had the inconsistency to feel emptily dull, it seemed indeed as if that meeting in the close labyrinth of the Maze had been the final tug of two strong opposing wills and that his had conquered. But it was with a flat feeling at the smallness of the result obtained by what must have been her prodigious efforts so to reveal herself, that he tried to reconcile his idea of her im-

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perious will, directed in its finality toward so petty an object as a lock of hair.

It contradicted his whole conception of her character; it contradicted the presentment of it in her pictured face; how much more was it contradicted by her face as he had actually seen it! Her look had been that of a rebellious angel bent on plucking by her own might the heart from some mysterious desire refused her by God Himself.

That abnormal restlessness came over him again—much the restlessness of the man fighting against the opium habit, who wills ardently and at the same time both to have and not to have the cherished poison.

The time between her last appearance and that fixed for "his" Melany's return passed, however, without the least sign from the capricious phantom. He sighed, as he left the house that last morning for the station, under the oppressive sense that what he knew he ought to feel as a deliverance, insisted on presenting itself as a frustration. In spite of the undoubted completeness of her withdrawal, he had an odd sense as of a web incompleated, hanging in the air above him from some huge, invisible and fateful loom.

He was wholly thankful, however, that in those days of placid monotony he had recovered much of his usual look. Even Blanc's glances showed a restored cheerfulness and the content with which one regards a promising convalescent.



### XXIII

**H**E drove alone to meet Melany, feeling that the attention required by a fidgety pair of greys would prevent her from making too uninterrupted a study of his face.

Then, when he had her close beside him, he forgot everything for a moment, in the renewed sense of her delicate, poetic charm that had in it always an underlying pathos—that stirred as nothing else had ever done the tenderest cords of his heart.

“Ah, but you’re thinner—you’re thinner,” she kept murmuring. “You’ve been iller than I knew. They ought to have sent for me.”

“My dearest,” he rejoined lightly, “you wouldn’t have me miss you as I’ve done, and gain weight? I assure you there’s been nothing more the matter with me than just your absence.”

The off mare made a plunge at a little negro with a shining pail who emerged suddenly from some bushes. He was glad of the chance to let Melany’s dissatisfied, anxious eyes dwell only on his profile.

“No,” she said presently in a low voice; “you’ve been ill . . . really ill.”

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"At all events," he smiled, "I'm quite well now."

She said nothing for a moment or two, then she brought out with repressed feeling:

"I wish, oh, I do wish—you weren't staying all alone . . . there."

"My dearest girl," he hastened to answer, "I'm surrounded by people! Darkies are tumbling over each other all day long, and Blanc fusses about me like an old woman."

"Does he stay near you . . . at night?" asked Melany.

"He did when I was feverish."

"Then he doesn't now?"

"No. It fidgets me to be bothered over."

Melany looked down at her hands, twisting them together in the way he remembered.

"I hate you to be alone . . . in the house . . . at night," she said, and her voice had its usual huskiness.

Radford replied in his kindest but most matter-of-fact tone:

"My dear darling, I thought we'd settled all that."

"It . . . comes back," she said, so low this time that he could just hear her above the brisk clapper of the greys' hoofs.

"What 'comes back'?" he forced his voice to say naturally.

"My dread . . . of that place."

"Ah, Melany! Melany!" he exclaimed, and she took

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the ambiguous expression in which he had sought refuge, for a reproach.

"I *do* fight against it, Evan,—I *do!* I *do!*" she protested. "But sometimes . . . no matter how hard I fight—" she let her interlocked hands fall apart with a helpless gesture, "it comes back," she ended.

He pulled the greys down to a walk at this, and slipped one arm about her, holding her hard against him.

"There's one thing please remember," he said, with his cheek to hers, "that in less than three weeks now, you'll be far away from here—with me!"

She gave herself up to his kiss with more passion than she had ever shown him—a passion both of love and a sort of desperation.

"Oh," she cried, as he lifted his face from hers, "if you would only *keep* me away—keep both of us away!"

"Give up 'Her Wish'?" he asked slowly. "Sell it again?"

And there was even more passion in her answering cry of, "Yes! Yes! Yes!" than there had been in her kiss.

It came then to Radford, with the double shock of surprise and bewilderment, that nothing—not even her pleading—would induce him to part with "Her Wish." He couldn't remain silent long enough to digest this queer revelation of something in himself that he had not suspected till that moment, so he said, again as if with reproach:

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"But I thought you loved it? I thought you had enjoyed with me making it beautiful again?"

"I thought so, too," she answered humbly, ashamed for so disappointing him yet incapable of lying to him even to save him and herself pain. "And in a way, I do love it. But . . . you see . . . though I don't feel *her* there any longer . . . I think of her. All the time I'm there, if I'm not thinking of her, I'm just fighting it off. It's as if she'd left something of herself soaked into the very walls. And now . . . when I see you so changed . . ."

"*'Changed'?*" stared Radford.

"So thin—so pale," she explained. "It's as if I felt her harming you—willing harm to you."

They talked to and fro in this strain until Hilton was reached. When he left her, after dinner, driving back alone through the fragrant April night, he felt mortally tired, fagged body and soul by the strain to "keep it up." He longed, more as a release from intolerable effort, than with a lover's ardour, that his wedding day were to-morrow. He almost conceded in his own thought, that he *was* in some obscure way "ill." A flatness had come over the savour of life, over his thoughts, his ambitions, even his love. He had read often that psychical experiences of the sort he had been undergoing "take it out of one." Something had certainly been taken out of him. A queer image of profound rest came to him just as he was falling asleep that night—

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the idea of himself stretched comfortably out in a sunny grave, pulling over him the April grass as a coverlet that would never be disturbed, for a sleep that would never change again into wakefulness.

However, he was to be cheered and not a little surprised by the way in which his strength and a more normal frame of mind returned to him during the long hours that he now spent at Hilton.

At first, this enforced absence from "Her Wish" had got sadly on his nerves, convinced as he was that there was some ultimate revelation yet to be made him on the part of her whom he had once called "the elusive lady." And with his recollection of this title there also came the memory of his having defied her in so many words. It disgusted him that he should feel a rill of superstitious awe flow through him with this memory. Indeed, his abashed humiliation before himself was such as to make him sure that he had no right to go on "mawkishly tampering," as he somewhat severely put it, with psychic phenomena, over which he not only had no control, but at the mere thought of which he couldn't control his own shrinking. Especially had he no right, in the face of Melany's distressed dread.

The idea of parting with "Her Wish"—of selling it again—was as painful to him as ever, but he had come to the conclusion that it would be as well if they *did* "keep away" after their marriage, for at least two or three years. He had a small but delightful villa near

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Florence, and Mr. Warrenger could come and stay with them there.

This idea was met with such sparkling, breathless joy by the girl, that he felt he had been rather a particular sort of brute not to have decided on it long before. To the old man it seemed simply as if one of the dreams of his youth had flowered as miraculously in the winter of his age, as a Christmas rose in snow. Radford had to describe the old Tuscan house to them inch by inch, and the whole "*podere*" not less minutely.

"Now," Melany cried, "I can *breathe*!"

And under her beautiful hand, that was so like another he had seen in circumstances which chilled him even now to remember, she lifted her young breast in the profoundest sigh of relief, as if throwing off an intolerable weight.

A week before the wedding, Steven Campbell, who had been called from New Orleans to New York, and then to England for some months, arrived at "Her Wish." He was to act as "best man" to Radford, and his letters had been full of such an unqualified and jubilant delight, both in his friend's engagement to Melany and his purchase of the old place, that Radford decided he had been mistaken about Steve having been in love with the girl.

"Well done, thou good and faithful Yankee!" he exclaimed, as he sprang up the steps at "Her Wish,"

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where Radford, Mr. Warrenger and Melany stood awaiting him. "A Virginian bride and a Virginian estate at one whack are 'some' overcoming of prejudice!"

"You dear old ass," was Radford's retort to this. "You are the prejudiced one, as you well know! If Melany had been half the Southerner *enragé* that you are, she wouldn't be standing here by me."

"Ah, you dear child," Steve was now saying to the girl, about whose shoulders he had flung a great arm. "He might be a Timbuctoian, for all I'd care, since he's brought that look to your face."

And bending down he kissed her, while she whispered:

"Dear Steve . . . oh, I *am* happy!"

"She's my only little sister, you know," said Steven, meeting his friend's moved look. "And I warn you I shall kiss her whenever I please."

At which, being a little embarrassed by too much feeling, they all laughed as at some exquisite piece of wit, and took Steven off to show him the restored splendours of "Her Wish."

It was after tea, which had been served this time in the library, that Radford and Melany found themselves alone. They could see from the open windows the two others walking back and forth on the lower terrace, while Steven smoked one of his big cigars.

"I am so glad," Melany said dreamily, "that you don't like cigars. I do so loathe them."

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And as Radford laughed out at the contrast of her dreamy tone with her prosaic statement, she added quaintly:

"But what I was really thinking was that Steven might smoke even horrors instead of good ones, and I wouldn't mind, I'm so thankful he's here with you!"

Radford was sitting on the sill of the window opposite her, and she was leaning back in the low armchair that Blanc had placed for her before the tea-table. The latter had now been removed, and leaning forward Radford put his hand on hers.

"Darling," he said remorsefully, "has it really troubled you so much—my staying here alone?"

She looked up at him as if it couldn't be put into words.

"Oh!" she said at last, simply unable to express otherwise the fulness of what she had felt about it.

Then before he could begin to tell her of his immense, repentant regret, she flushed and paled, in the quick succession that was so characteristic, and exclaimed under her breath:

"Evan! I'm going to make you a confession."

"Well, dear?" he smiled.

"Evan . . ." she began—then stopped—then, with the nervous tremor he remembered, "Evan . . . I've thought sometimes . . . I've wondered . . ." She bent forward so that he could hear the whispered words, "Have you ever . . . felt her here?"



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The afternoon sunlight poured in through the gently blowing white curtains and danced upon the opposite wall. He thanked such gods as are that he happened to be sitting with his back to it, and he reflected on the three kinds of lie that an honourable man may tell with honour: the lie that guards a friend's secret, the lie about a woman for her own sake, and the lie *to* a woman for the same reason. He brought it out with no perceptible hesitation and with a really magnificent effect of truth:

"Never!

Still she kept on his face her anxious, questioning eyes.

"You've never had a hint . . . a sensation? *Never* . . . ?" here she clasped her hands as if imploring him under some stress of conviction that she couldn't conquer. "Never . . . heard or . . . *seen* anything?"

"*'Seen'*? I?" he asked, as if the preposterousness of the idea really staggered him. "My *belovèd* child!"

His laugh was as splendid a success as his "Never!" had been. A more natural sound could not have been uttered. And yet the tenseness of her look and her clasped hands didn't relax under it.

"You don't know," she said, "you *couldn't* know—how I've been haunted . . ." the tremor ran through her again . . . "yes, haunted by the idea that she might have given *me* up—just to put us off our guard—to

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make it easy for *you* to come here, and then . . . Oh, are you *sure* she hasn't been near you?"

"Quite sure," he lied with the same admirable imitation of candour.

"You see," she went on, her fingers twisting together now, and her pale face bent toward them, "I . . . I *dreamed* that you had seen her."

Radford caught it from her with a tone that had the effect of a shrug.

"Oh, my dearest dear! If you're going to talk of *dreams* . . .!"

"But tell me once more," she pleaded. "It's such a blessed relief to hear you say it. You really never, never have?"

"Never!" he said again.

And then, shocked as if a fork of lightning had split the soft shadows of the room beyond, he saw what he had so gallantly lied about—the beautiful, almost insolently smiling image of that other. In a "gown like a rose" this time, she had sprung up like some magic flower directly behind the girl's chair. Over that unconscious head, she sent across to him a look of exquisite mockery—a look at the same time sweet and stinging, disdainful and indulgent, assured and reproachful.

The imperious expression that had yet been half a prayer was quite gone. Nothing could have exceeded the calm arrogance of that smiling gaze.

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And as he gazed back—no more able to withdraw his eyes from hers than had she been the fabled basilisk, instead of simply the most enchanting presentment of a woman possible to imagine—her eyes released him suddenly, dropped for an instant to the girl's dark head, then lifted to his again.

A hundred poets could not have expressed her meaning more perfectly. It was as if she said to him: "Compare us . . . ! Here we are together—the living woman and the ghost. Which in truth seems more living—she or I?"

Her sudden appearance, her look of subtle raillery that seemed to him of such endless duration, had lasted but a fraction of time, as time is counted by men, yet in that infinitesimal space, he had the impression of a reality so stupendous that in its presence he and the girl before him were but as films of gossamer. It was as if life—raised to a pitch above all his possible conceptions of it, sent out to him terrible vibrations that shook the molecules of both mind and body, as a strong musical tone will cause particles of sand to leap into fantastic patterns. For one wild instant, the phantom seemed the real being, and Melany the phantom. That glowing face with its honeyed rapacious mouth—never more honeyed or more rapacious than now with that faint subtle smile compared to which the famous smile of Mona Lisa was mere craftiness—that web of gorgeous hair redder than any red of earth—the whole, supreme effect in her

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utter stillness as of the stillness of incandescence—these dimmed the grosser life of flesh and blood, as a shaft of sunlight dims a candle-flame. He felt himself to be such a flame—this conscious paling in him of the thing he had known as "life" was a slow fading towards extinction . . . towards nothingness. . . . And she too . . . "his" Melany was paling, waning, in that intolerable glare of something more real than reality . . .

He started, at what seemed the shrill rending of a silken curtain close to his face, then found himself in the mild light of common day, with Melany clinging to him, pleading out of a white, stricken face:

"Oh, dearest! Don't look so . . . ! Don't look so! Oh, what's the matter? Is it your heart again?"

He caught at this, sinking down upon the window-seat.

"Yes . . . my heart. But it's nothing . . . only . . ." he dived in the frightful confusion of his mind for the medical term and brought it out with a sigh of relief . . . "only functional, old Borridge says." He succeeded in producing a weak smile. "If you'll just, like a dear darling, ring for Blanc . . . my tonic, you know."

Then he drifted helplessly off into a swoon like that which had followed the terribly real manifestation on the night when the lock of hair and the glove had been taken from his bedside, only this time he was unconscious for a much shorter period.

## XXIV

**T**HREE things helped Radford to carry off this unfortunate collapse with a good front. One was the fact, gathered almost immediately from Melany herself, that the appearance which had seemed to him to last so long had only been in reality a matter of a few seconds.

"You were talking to me so perfectly naturally one second, and the next . . . oh! you looked as if you were dying!" she had wailed, when he was quite restored and the others had left them together again.

His tremendous desire to shield her from any possible suspicion that what she had feared was so dreadfully the thing to *be* feared, gave him the strength to say, even in that moment:

"I'm horribly ashamed of myself for keeling over like this, darling; but you see now, it's only a most commonplace ailment and not in the least supernatural."

"All the same," she had replied, holding his cheek close against hers, as she knelt beside the lounge on which Steven and Blanc had firmly placed him, "I wish there were *ten* oceans rolling between us and 'Her Wish' . . . I couldn't leave you to-night, except for Steve's being with you . . ."

The other things had to do with this same fact of

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his being able still to "ward off," from her at least, all knowledge of that overwhelming presence. They consisted of Blanc's triumphant "I-told-you-so" attitude when summoned by Steven to administer Dr. Borridge's heart- tonic, and Steven's and Mr. Warrenger's ready acceptance of the man's conviction as to the cause of Radford's fainting.

"*J'ai dit souvent à Monsieur—ce matin même,*" he declared, "*que Monsieur a trop vite cessé de prendre sa médecine . . . et voilà que j'ai eu raison!*"

"You see, old boy, I've come home just in time to bully you for your own good—and Melany's!" Steven had exclaimed on hearing this. "That heart physic shall go down as regularly as the sun—or I—go off! A charming bridegroom you'll make if you crumple up in a heap at the altar-rail."

Radford promised from that time forth to take the tonic meekly until he should have quite emptied the bottle, and Melany returned to Hilton with her father somewhat comforted.

"You know," Steve, who walked part of the way home with them, explained, "the dear old man rather did himself up by overworking last year. That's why I had him down here. He's perfectly sound . . . but high-strung. My eye! a woman—even you, you dear child—aren't a bit more high-strung than Evan. But all he needs is to get away and play Fairy Prince with you, little sister. And mind you, only let him play.

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No more work for another year at least. Then he'll be right as a trivet."

"He shall be the idlest man that ever lived," Melany had laughed back, in her relief. "You'll be ashamed of him, I'll keep him so idle."

"Ah . . . well, as to that," Steven had replied with smiling dubiousness, "love making is a very busy idleness!"

And now it was sheer dogged pride that fixed Radford in his determination to see things out to the bitter end. How bitter that end might be, he could not tell, but of one thing he was sure, nothing could possibly be bitterer or more of an "end" to his self-respect than to feel he had funked a thing which, he was equally sure, depended on the strength of his own will to carry to a definite conclusion. The next time—if there was to be a next time—that she confronted him, he would not remain passive, as heretofore the mere soul-staggering unusualness of the thing had stunned him into being. At the first glimmer of her approach, even at a pounce so lightning-like as had been the last, he would clench himself hard against her—make what he had heard Theosophists call an "auric shell" about himself—case himself in an armour of will and positivity that at least, if he died in the effort, would let him die fighting, and not merely dissolve like vapour, sucked up by some powerful, occult fire.

He almost wished, in the stress of his unshared pre-

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dicament, that he were what is called "a good Catholic." He had heard from those who he had every reason to believe "knew," that the Jesuits, those most learned probably of the world's spiritual directors, did not scorn or shrug at the idea of such perils as this by which he was beset—had indeed a method of dealing with them. How restful, how marvellously sustaining it would be to have under the roof with him this last week some wise and kindly priest, to whom he would seem neither a lunatic nor a fool, and who would arm him with a weapon of ghostly defence. But a little more thought on the subject made him feel certain that the priestly advice would be a sprinkling of holy-water, both actual and metaphorical, and that the weapon would consist of a firm "*Vade retrone, Satana. . .*" Whereas it was no more in him to believe in the efficacy of holy-water than it was to think of the lovely and capricious, if somewhat overwhelming, phantom as Satan.

Not that he was an irreligious man; on the contrary, his religion only seemed vague because it could not be circumscribed by any of the creeds that men had set like hard vessels in the infinite sea of the divine, thinking that the forms thus filled with some drops of its boundless essence contained the whole. That there was a centre without circumference (which most men called God), and to which the centre of his own being directly responded, he felt as he felt that he lived. According



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to his faith there was nothing supernatural, as all that lay between this centre in limited space which was himself, and that supreme centre of limitlessness which was God, could but of necessity be "natural." It lay with him, therefore, to fight against this extraordinary manifestation of the betweenness (he could think of no better word) just as he would fight against any other mighty and impalpable force—say, the force of his own passions.

And yet "fight" was not the exact expression for the course that he felt he must take; rather, it was a need of obtaining on his side a dominion over her that would prevent her from advancing too far and too potently into the sphere set apart for creatures of flesh and blood. The peril, it seemed to him, was not so directly from her, as from a certain essence of that other world that she brought with her; as if—the image presented itself fantastically but with a perfect expression of his felt, not reasoned, meaning—as if a mermaid seeking a closer *rapproch* with some inland mortal should bring with her a tidal wave that might sweep him away.

He realised too, very clearly, that one of the chief perils lay within himself—in the undoubted fascination that the whole strange adventure had for him—that she herself exerted over him, quite as in some Irish legend the fairy queen draws to her some mortal at once willing and unwilling—fearful and yet not so

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fearful but that one of his fears is to lose sight of her forever.

He simply could not endure the thought that all he had seen and suffered was to end in the vague idiocy of so-called "spirit manifestations," so usually brought to a climax by the frantic movements of furniture that seems capering of its own volition. He could not believe, he absolutely refused to believe, that the whole amazing drama had been played to the end that a phantom hand should remove a piece of hair, and hang a glove in a rose-tree! No; she had a meaning, an object, and what *his* object must be, was to hold her far enough off to keep his mundane senses from being submerged by the tremendous current she brought with her, yet not too far to make communication impossible.

There were four days and nights left him in which to experiment from this new point of view.

He brought back from this descent, or ascent, into things, a remarkable sense of quiet strength. Blanc had returned permanently to his quarters in the extreme back of the house. Steven occupied a room in the east wing, a room removed from his by a corridor as long as that which led to the spinning-room. He was punctilious, as he had promised, about taking the heart-tonic, and without a doubt felt much braced by it. His talks and manner with Steven were models of what one might call normality. If his whole air was rather deliberately quiet, it seemed very natural in a man whose

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heart, whether "functionally" or "organically," had been, as Steven put it, "kicking up like the devil." Steven had used this expression when urging on Radford the necessity of a lamb-like behaviour for some time to come.

His behaviour was indeed so entirely and reassuringly lamb-like that Blanc felt no misgivings at being exiled, and Steven, having insisted on eleven o'clock as the latest hour for him to go to bed, left him each evening at his door, without the least doubt that bed was where he went forthwith.

It was from this hour on, however, that Radford felt himself particularly wide-awake. He would sit by the open window, waiting till Steven should be soundly asleep; then he would rise and go down, wandering about the house, and grounds—watching, listening, waiting. Somehow, though for two nights he waited in vain, his nerves were quite steady. He had a perfectly assured feeling that he was to see her again, and that all was to be made clear to him.

The third night, about one o'clock, as he was approaching the house after a long rest in a hammock under one of the horse-chestnuts, he stopped short, feeling his heart give a hot plunge, in spite of all his determined preparation for just such a sound or seeming.

There had stolen to him, above the rustle of a night full of blowing leaves, the low hum of a minor chord, rising and falling, pausing, then repeating itself again.

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He stopped only long enough to summon all his will, reason, fortitude—all of that power of a man over the lesser part of himself for which metaphysics has so many names and none adequate. Then he went quietly along the house to the court of the spinning-room, and as he had been there only a half-hour before, he knew that the shutters were wide open, as he had left them.

The moon was nearly full, but hidden by thick swathes of silverish cloud, between which showed black-blue depths, and now and then the cold glitter of a star.

But though the clouds flew on above him, the lower breeze seemed suddenly to have dropped, for there was now no sound of blowing leaves. In entering the court he seemed to have stepped into a well of silence. Even the fountain, strangely hushed, was like a rod of glass twisting silently in the heavy atmosphere. With a deep breath, as though he sought to inhale some force more subtle than the actual air by which his body lived, he turned and faced the window.

Here again, was something new, something that he was not prepared for. The whole unshuttered aperture was glowing as though lighted up from within, but the glow was of so strange, so inexplicable a nature, that he brushed his hair before his eyes, thinking that his keyed nerves were tricking him. When he looked again, however, it was the same. The window seemed to be partially filled with the finest, iridescent cobwebs, or, more literally, with the most fragile threads of glass

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spun finer than cobwebs. It was as if these gleaming filaments gave forth the glow that lighted, or rather shimmered a soft iridescence upon the room within. They extended even beyond the window, as a light cloud of thistle-down might cling together before a breeze blew it apart, and float like a transparent curtain in the air.

He drew nearer, cautiously, slowly, forcing his reluctant body, as a rider forces a shy horse; and as he went, he had the strangest feeling of wading through some element quite new to him, of being in some inexplicable way half in, half out, of the atmosphere of the solid earth. He had the same sensation of breathing with difficulty that oppresses men on great mountain heights, and he seemed to tread a substance at once elastic and clogging, that dragged at his feet yet buoyed him up. It was as if, in this sudden swimming and swaying about him of all that had a moment ago been most stable, the one strong, inflexible solidity was just that rod of his own will to which with every faculty, every tendril of his spirit, he clung like a man clinging to a steel rope above the glassy funnel of a whirlpool so swift that it seems quiet . . .

And now, rigid with that desperate clenching of himself upon his own central reality, he knelt upon the stone bench and looked into the room.

The room itself gave him back, as in a mirror, the impression of his own state. It was half in, half out,

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of the atmosphere of his cognised world—the same, yet not the same. If inanimate objects had each a diaphanous counterpart—something corresponding to what are called the souls of men—then in this room one would have said that some mysterious spell had released them. He could not express it more clearly to himself, then or later. The room was there—but transfigured, subtilised—and to its walls and ceiling clung the same fragile web of iridescence like filaments of glass finer than cobwebs. *She* stood there beside the spinning-wheel, but transformed, transfigured like the room—yet so real that the wheel hummed beneath her touch, giving out its low minor chord.

She was not looking towards him but away, as if into vistas of unimaginable delight, as if the thread she spun were to be her clue to them, as if when her task was done one leap would send her flying to the very heart of joy. And what she spun and wound back upon the bobbin were loose lengths of those iridescent filaments, that she caught carelessly from the air about her, never changing her fixed gaze as upon vistas of unimaginable delight . . .

One instant he looked on this astounding vision—for it seemed to him, even then, only a vision, a glimpse behind a dream-curtain woven of spun rainbows—the next, the diffused light from high-blowing, silverish clouds shone tranquilly about him and he heard the rain-like patter of the little fountain . . .

**H**E did not return to the house after this experience, so much the strangest and yet so much the most elusive that he had yet had. When he was somewhat recovered from the daze in which it left him, he went slowly back over the fresh wet turf, to the hammock, and lay down again under the canopy of leaves. He felt this time no exhaustion or giddiness, only the natural "let down" sensation that follows a supreme effort of will. But his mind seemed to ring with the memory of it, as one's ears ring after some tremendous peal of sound; or a closer analogy would be to think of his mind as a breathless pool over which an elfin bird had skimmed, dipping a fugitive wing then vanishing. His thoughts, like the ripple from such a contact, spread in circles widening out to a misty shore—widening out on that deep of conjecture which has, in truth, no shore.

The one clear impression that remained with him was of the supernal beauty of the face thus seen by him for the first time in profile. It was, to her full face, what one might imagine the soul of a mortal to its body; yet it was not "spiritual" as men use the term—merely of a loveliness so passionately unearthly that one marvelled at seeing it in a form familiar to earth.

On every former occasion, when his eyes had been

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"opened," as the saying is, her eyes had held him; this time they had been fixed on a vision beyond what it was in her power to reveal to him, on vistas, as it had seemed to him, of unimaginable delight. It was as if he had clenched his will too hard against her, and she had turned from him back to the beauty from which she had emerged to seek him . . . Yes, with a light painfully crude, it flared on him that he himself had turned her from him with her secret untold—sent her back like a wistful Peri, not from the gates of Paradise, but from the heavy portals of this his own "unintelligible world". . .

He lay with his hands under his head, gazing up at the blowing leaves, through which now and then darted the spiky brilliance of a star. He was searching in his mind for something to which to liken her. "Ghost," "phantom," "apparition," "wraith"—all these seemed too mundane, too crude to express that magical, enchanted beauty, which was yet, in some way beyond all reason, "real."

He thought of Bran and his voyage to the Island of Heart's Desire, of Lamia and Melusine, of Fata Morgana, and of the Lady in the queer tale he had read on the night of his first vigil: of how she had told the King "that he should not ask but earthly thing, for she was none earthly thing, but a ghostly thing," and of how the King had replied that "he ne would ask none other thing . . ."



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Since the far, dim beginning of romance, before even the story of Lilith, when the Apsarases, "fairy-like beings, beautiful and voluptuous," had appeared to the Aryan heroes, men had sung and told of such happenings . . . There must be some common source for all the legends: a few men here and there, having caught such a glimpse as he had caught through the grey veil of everyday, parted for a moment by a mystic breath from the beyond, must have wrought songs and poems about it—filling in the blank spaces with the purfling of imagination. What easier, for instance, than for a nervous, high-flown boy, with the green-sickness of romantic youth upon him, placed as he, Radford, was placed, to fancy himself the object of an exquisite, eerier passion like that by which "*La Belle Dame sans Merci*" held men in thrall. He wondered, indeed, if he himself, as a boy, could have stood the test of an adventure so opposed to all that is called "natural" and so prolonged. He quite comprehended how those who gave themselves up to such impressions—those vulgarly called mediums and the like—so often ended by becoming insane.

The slightest tip to the perfect balance of mind needed to withstand them and there would be the plunge down into chaotic mysticism, into what he had already at times sensed as a measureless abyss. Perhaps, after all, it was just as well that he had forced her farther back

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into her airy caverns behind her impalpable, shredded veil of iridescence.

He had heard much prattle at one time about "astral planes," about a sort of rainbow succession of such "planes" or "worlds" up to what was called, in the Oriental nomenclature of a certain sect, the Devachanic. In fact, with a really magnificent impudence, a certain person of that sect had written a little volume describing how he had attained—above the humbler St. Paul, who only claimed to have been "caught up" for a brief space to the third heaven—even to the seventh heaven of this series, how he had promenaded there as on Piccadilly, and how he was now recounting all the marvels he had there heard and seen.

Even such preposterous, barefaced inventions, Radford was fair enough to suppose, must be based upon some faint glimpse of things forbidden to man except in glimpses. And yet, it irked him that such glimpses should have no meaning, no import, for those to whom they were vouchsafed, whether of good or evil; for one could hardly dignify by the immense term "evil" the nervous strain under which the whole thing had put him and from which he was suffering now, even to the extent of having his heart—what was Borridge's word?—"functionally" affected by it.

Thus, in the soft May night, alone but very far from being lonely, he tried to reflect logically and sanely, as

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upon another's predicament, upon the strange, unsolvable situation in which he found himself. No sooner, however, did he cease actively to think, than he found himself in the haunting atmosphere which some dreams project into the following day. He had the uncanny sensation that though he could neither see nor feel them, those delicate multi-coloured filaments were swaying gently in the air about him, spangling the grass, hanging from the leaves overhead. It was as if some impalpable mesh, fine as thought and as strong, had been cast about him—so lightly that he was not aware of it except in thought—so surely that not even thought could release him from it . . .

Springing up, as if a physical effort might rid him of the eerie fancy, he realised that the dawn had come. With it came a realisation even more wholesome and uplifting: this dawn, so refreshing in itself, held yet a fuller meaning than the mere return of the sunlit candour of day—it was a very special day that it heralded, a day to be marked with a white pearl, just the beginning of the last twenty-four hours that lay between him and the day of his wedding with Melany. And at the thought of her, there in the quickening light with the first bird-calls showering clear as drops of rain about him, the spell of night dissolved, and he wondered whether he hadn't dreamed fantastically. He recalled having had dreams not all unlike it, as a child . . . puzzled sleep-wanderings through woods of glass

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tangled in rainbows, with a lovely fairy who was kind to him and showed him the way, but whose face he could never see.

The sun rose in tranquil splendour, and was greeted by the waking earth as jubilantly as though it had never risen before. With that sweet sanity of exultation enfolding him, Radford was sure now that he had only dreamed. The very difference of what he had seemed to see last night, for that fleeting instant, from all her other appearances, made him doubly sure. Even her face, so strangely transfigured in delicate profile, was just the way that dreams metamorphose a familiar face, making it like and yet unlike.

He regained his room before any one had come into the house, and lying down in bed so that Blanc might not suspect his night's absence, fell profoundly asleep.

The sun that had risen in such effulgence even exceeded his promise of bringing with him a perfect day: he had, with his dazzling magic, turned May into June, and as the hours wore on, the dry, intense heat grew almost oppressive. The sky was without a cloud, so blue that at the zenith it looked purple. The bourdon of wild honey-bees about the great hedges, now covered with tiny rosettes of yellowish bloom, added queerly to the effect of being in the breath of a great furnace, as if their continual, droning hum might be the throb of the engine that controlled it.

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Steven, looking huger than ever in his shirt-sleeves, paraded restlessly, seeking a cool spot. He announced that the thermometer in the hall stood at eighty-eight, that it was the most dashed unseasonable weather he had ever known, and that if it were really June, or July as it seemed to be, he would certainly predict a thunder-storm.

Radford, who enjoyed great heat like any lizard, smiled drowsily from a long wicker-chair, on which he was stretched out, and said that for his part he found the weather perfection.

Steven with a grunt retorted that he wouldn't find it perfection in a *stuffy* railway car to-morrow, or at least, that if *he* would, he was sure that "poor little Melany" wouldn't.

"Ah, yes," Radford mused, his face changing, "by this time to-morrow we'll be married and off, won't we? Somehow I can't take it in."

"It'll take *you* in all right . . . I mean this deuced 'hot wave' will," Steven retorted, "when you find yourself in a Pullman with a hundred and ten degrees of it submerging you. Ouf! I'm melting. Isn't there a cooler place in this house?"

Radford didn't answer at once; then he said:

"The rooms in the east wing are always cool."

"You mean the 'haunted' wing?" asked Steven.

"Yes. Why?" Radford asked in his turn, staring a little at Steven's use of the word "haunted." "You

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haven't any objection to the n on *that* account, I suppose?"

Now it was Steven who didn't answer at once.

"I'll tell you a rather rum thing," he said at last, speaking slowly and not looking at Radford. "You know what poppycock I consider ghost stories and all that sort of twaddle, but upon my soul,—there's something about those rooms,—the one with the portrait, you know, and the one they call the spinning-room, that—well, the fact is they depress me."

"Depress you? How?" said Radford, whose languor, if Steven had been looking at him he would have seen, was completely gone.

"I don't know *how*," he replied bluntly; "I only know it's a fact. I may go in there as gay as a bushel of larks, and before I've stayed there ten minutes I'm as blue as indigo. Not exactly 'blue' either, but all fussed up with a horrid sort of feeling, as if things were going to happen . . . unpleasant things, you know. Now please *don't* think," he exclaimed, holding up a big hand in protest, as Radford gave a suppressed exclamation, "that I'm for one second even inferring that it has anything to do with such rubbish as those old ghost tales about her . . . What I've made it out to be, is the force of association. There's not a native about here, white or black, high or low, who hasn't, for a hundred years at least, handed about those legends; and the *thought* sticks—do you see what I mean? It's the sort

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of feeling I suppose one would have if one's house was built over a place of execution. There is a house in London built where Tyburn gallows used to stand. Well, though I don't believe in ghosts, I wouldn't like to live in that house, d'you see?"

Radford had sunk back and resumed the lazy smile that was now a matter of artifice.

"The proud lady of 'Her Wish' would be greatly flattered by your comparison," he said.

"Stuff!" said Steven. "You don't catch my meaning, that's all. I'll even grant that some of *her* thoughts have stuck; but it's all a matter of thought—mine as well as hers and the others. Perhaps that portrait has something to do with it. Whenever I take a look at that infernal face of hers . . ."

"*'Infernal'?*" interrupted Radford, sitting up again.

Steven was frowning as if at the puzzle of his own disjointed thoughts which he was trying to fit into some sort of coherence.

"Well, infernally beautiful, if you like," he said; "but to me it's got a look on it that simply shrivels me . . . shrivels up any admiration I might feel . . . the look that Lucifer's twin sister might have had—a 'damnation-in-my-own-way-before-heaven-in-God's' sort of look. Br-r-r!" and he shook his great shoulders boyishly. "To me it's a horrible face—like what I imagine the face of those medieval what-you-may-call-'ems . . .

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Vampires! That's it . . . She's the spit image to me of a Vampire."

There was a pause in which Radford stared at him curiously.

"At least she seems—in her portrait—to have made a deep impression on you," he said dryly.

"Oh, I don't mean a great human-bat that sucks one's blood," Steven returned, still very much in earnest. "I only mean the sort of will that would suck out a man's soul . . . his own will as a man, you know. Why, my dear chap, think of her *real* story! Could you beat it for Vampireishness?"

Radford laughed.

"She's even set you to coining words for her," he said.

"But *could* you?" Steven persisted.

"Could I what? Think of anything more like the behaviour of a Vampire—if Vampires *have* got behaviour!—than hers towards Geoffrey Branton?"

"Just that."

Radford pondered it.

"Branton seems to have got away from her pretty successfully," he then remarked.

"Got away, yes, but how?" retorted Steven. "Without his heart—sucked dry of everything that makes life worth living. A fine 'getting away' that was! Besides," he growled, as if really angry at a dead man's



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cruel treatment by a dead woman, "look at that last letter she sent him—a regular Vampire scream of menace from the other side of the grave! Ugh!"

He rose with a wriggle that was half a genuine shudder, half the effort to shake off the unpleasant sensation that merely talking of her caused him. "I've always thought her the most odious, loathsome creature possible to imagine! Her beauty's no beauty to *me*, I can tell you—whatever you as a painter may find in it."

XXVI

HE took a turn away, then came back. "The whole honest truth is—" he began, standing over his friend and rattling some loose objects in his pocket, decidedly embarrassed at the prospect of telling the whole honest truth. "Well," at last he blurted, hunching his shoulders as if for a plunge into cold water, "the fact is that I wouldn't have talked in this strain except for Melany . . . My dear old man,"—he sank down suddenly opposite Radford and laid his hand on his knees—"what *I* feel is just nothing to what *she* feels!"

Radford looked back at him with all the amazement that this declaration caused him. If Melany's dread was such as to have led her into confiding in Steven about it, then all that he had endured was quite in vain. Steven's next words, though, somewhat softened his former statement.

"Not," he pursued, "that she has any more feeling about ghosts than I have . . . it's only a shrinking from the whole place that she can't control. It's all the queerer because she's fond of it in a way . . . think's it quite beautiful and all that . . . but it seems that she

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would rather leave Virginia for good, than live in it. It's a sort of—" he paused, searching for the right expression.

"A sort of obsession?" supplied Radford quietly.

"Yes, exactly . . . an obsession. She told me she'd fought it desperately, with might and main—the poor child cried at last—she feels so ashamed, so 'ungrateful' she said, but . . . Well, I promised I'd talk to you, so I'm doing it. It does seem an awful pity—it's a stunning place and you've rigged it out stunningly—but what's there to do, with Melany feeling like this about it? You see, she'd never have told me, I suppose, except that I happened to mention how those rooms affected me. She felt that I'd understand then, and—well, she even said as much—make *you* understand."

Radford looked down at a leaf that he had pulled from a vine near the door, and was fitting between his hands as boys do to make a whistle.

"You mean you think I ought to sell it?" he said.

"It seems a rotten shame," Steven replied; "but can you suggest anything else?"

After some moments Radford said, still busy with the leaf:

"Very well—I'll tell her to-night that I'll sell it."

"Blessèd old boy!" was Steven's response to this. "I *told* her that's what you'd say the minute you knew how she felt about it!" And as a great tobacco merchant he was nothing if not practical, he added by way of

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consolation: "A whacking price you ought to get for it too, tae way you've fixed it up!"

No stranger feeling had come to Radford during the past six weeks than that which crept over him, in spite of all his efforts to resist it, when he saw the suppressed but exultant delight with which Melany received his announcement about "Her Wish." He had come to love the place with an intensity foreshadowed by his first impression of having always known and loved it. That she could take delight—even this veiled, remorseful delight—in something which, if she knew him at all, she must know was a bitter disappointment to him, seemed to spread like a thin, transparent hardness between them, so that he felt rather as if he were trying to reach a lover-like closeness through a sheet of glass. To him she had never seemed less near than when in her triumphant gratitude she felt herself, because of his great sacrifice for her, quite in his heart of hearts.

There was no resentment in this feeling of his; only a flatness, something like what he had experienced when she first returned after her stay in the North—an unreality in their relations, as if, had their love been what they thought it, she would have insisted on braving it out at "Her Wish" with him, no matter what her shrinking. He wouldn't have allowed her to do so, of course; only, some obstinate conviction deep within him made him sure that it should have been her desire.

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It was odd, he reflected, walking home after having spent the early hours of their wedding eve with her, how one woman of that race had made the keeping of "Her Wish" a condition of her marriage with the man she loved, and another, to all practical intents, the giving up of it.

Those who have no love of places, of portions of the earth for the earth's own sake as it were, cannot conceive of the strength with which such a passion may root itself in natures that have this capacity. As he approached the old place this evening, walking slowly up the avenue of firs that he might catch the view he best loved of its old iron gates and box-hedges, Radford had the sad, oppressed feeling of one who has just realised that a dear friend has developed some serious malady which sooner or later will bring death.

The evening was as sultry as the day had been. The rising moon shone with an almost tropic splendour, and as Radford looked at the upper heaven strewn magnificently with stars unquenched as yet by moonlight, he saw beyond them the pale flicker of lightning. There was no distant thunder, only now and then that shaken flag of luminosity spangled with stars and covering the whole sky with breathless beauty.

He came within sight of "Her Wish," and stood still to gaze at it brooding on top of its gradual, terraced hillside under that marvellous sky. The stillness was so intense that suddenly it seemed to give forth sound

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as of distant surf, and the moon creeping higher, struck glints of light from the dark hedges as it had done the first time he had looked on them. And, just as then, there came over him that obscure, spellbound feeling, as though he had known and loved them long ago in some wild dream;—just as then, the dark hedges seemed like some boundary of Fate . . .

He passed through them and, turning to the left, went as he had done that first night, through the avenue of clipped *Euonymus* to the Maze, and so down into the rose-garden.

May in Virginia is what June is in colder climates. The garden might have been Armida's for richness of blossom, for prodigal heaping of rose upon rose, in wreaths, in clusters, in heavy garlands, in veritable fountains of scented bloom. Only about the grave, where grew the more reserved beauty of the roses of Damascus, were the flowers set delicately apart, each in its frame of dark leaves, each breathing forth the honeyed fragrance which no other rose can equal . . .

He stood there, thinking of that first night, when in the November air that perfume had flowed about him real as now; of the other times, when no tree in this garden was in blossom, and yet a fragrance like theirs had filled the room. He thought of her, and of how in a "gown like a rose" she had suddenly sprung up behind the chair of her namesake whom she hated for bearing her name. He wondered why she should have come to

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him, and then, without anything revealed, any desire accomplished, have withdrawn at the first real effort of his will to repel her. After all, though, the life of everyday as it was lived by human beings in the actual world was often futile and purposeless enough, heaven knew. Why should he suppose that the mere shedding of a human body would produce logic and reasonableness in the actions of one who had been so extravagantly capricious when she wore it? Had he really seen her for the last time? Was it all to end with this blank abruptness like some ether-bred extravaganza?

He bent and put his face to one of the blossoms. It was cool and heavy with dew—no *rosa mystica* . . . a mere lovely product of the element called “earth” . . . and yet, after all, just for that as mysterious as any phantom rose that ever bloomed.

He felt the stillness swelling in a great chord, like a deaf man to whom sound is only a vibration. He was sure that if his ears were not sealed there would be a strange music in that silence . . .

“Good-night . . .” he said at last, turning to go. “Good-bye . . .” He broke off the rose that he had touched and laid it on the grave. “Good-bye . . . elusive lady,” he murmured again; and suddenly the silence broke with the twang of a snapped harp-string. Towards the south of the garden, from the thicket of roses, came a light, sweet laugh, running up a little scale, then stopping short . . .

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He wheeled, his heart galloping. The stillness had closed down again, cloyingly scented and sultry. There was no further sound. The clear notes remained on his ear as if some bird had sung suddenly out of sleep. A kind of recklessness took him.

"Won't you come . . . for good-bye?" he said aloud. "I'm waiting . . . I'm not afraid."

Here Steven's voice dived through the heavy stillness like a huge fish: everything more delicate fled at the great splash of sound.

"Hello! I say! Is that you, Evan?" he called. "What the deuce are you mooning about down there?" He came to the head of the stone steps. "By George!" he said, as Radford mounted towards him, "do you know, you gave me the devil of a turn? I was strolling by, thinking I'd meet you in the avenue and walk back . . . and I saw something white down there near that grave and . . ." He hooked his arm firmly in Radford's. "Do you know," he continued, "that this is really a spooky place to be alone in after dark? Blanc went to the station about five, to look after some things he expected, and hasn't got back yet, so I've been quite by myself." He paused to give his next words more weight. "My dear man,—there is something dashed queer about this whole place when you're by yourself in it."

Radford had all he could do to keep his voice from showing something of what he was feeling.



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"What's happened to make *you* feel it?" he managed to utter, with sufficient naturalness.

"Nothing's happened. That's the worst of it. It's just the feeling that it's *going* to happen . . . any damn second, that makes it so horrid. It's as if everything were sort of holding its breath at you . . . furniture and all . . . Ghosts! My stars! A ghost would be a relief!"

"Perhaps it's the night," suggested Radford, who had withdrawn his arm as soon as he could, because he was afraid that Steven would feel the heavy beating of his heart through it. "It's a weird sort of night . . . Moon and stars and lightning, all together."

"Don't know *what* it is," growled Steven; "but whatever it is, I've put in some beastly hours. I believe Melany's got me hoodooed with her strange notion. I wouldn't," he wound up with conviction, "live in this place—in that house—beautiful as it is—if you gave it to me! It's nothing but thoughts, as I said, but the thoughts are just about as disagreeable as a churchyard of ghosts!"

As Radford made no immediate reply, he asked abruptly:

"Didn't it ever get on *your* nerves . . . being alone here?"

"Oh, I've felt nervous once or twice—yes," Radford admitted.

"Well, what about to-night? You must have got

## THE GHOST GARDEN 223

bravely over it to go down into that rose graveyard? Do you feel anything queer about to-night?"

"Nothing queerer than I've felt before," said Radford. "I don't mind it, you know," he added.

"Well, to-night has put me plump on Melany's side," announced Steven. "I'm as jumpy as a cat, and I'll be dashed glad when the wedding's over and we've both cleared out."

They had come within the light of the hall lamps and Radford, turning so that his back was towards them, faced Steven.

"Steve," he said, "what *has* happened?"

Steven tried to meet his eyes and laugh, but the laugh broke short.

"I don't know what possessed me," he then said, rather shamefacedly, "but when I first began to feel creepy, I rather enjoyed it. You know how boys love to feel scared. Well, I was just in that idiotic state. I thought I'd go and have a turn in those rooms . . . have a look at that portrait . . . just to see how much I *could* 'creep' . . ."

"Well?" said Radford, keeping his eyes on him.

"It's all the rankest nonsense, of course," fumbled Steven, trying to tell his vague adventure as triflingly as possible. "I went there with a candle—of all the fool things!—and as I was looking up at that devilish picture . . . the candle went out—some draught, you know . . . just flared, and left me there in the pitch dark."

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"Well?" said Radford again.

"'Well'! It wasn't 'well' the least little bit, I can tell you," retorted Steven. "I got lost in that confounded room . . . couldn't find the door . . . If I'd been a superstitious chap, I believe I'd have ended by having a fit . . ."

"Why?" said Radford.

This time Steven was quite serious:

"Don't know," he replied slowly; "just sheer God-forsaken panic . . ." He added more slowly still, after a slight hesitation, as if the words came almost against his will, "I had the damndest queer feeling that some one was in there with me . . . some one who could see in the dark and who was laughing at me . . . sneering, you know . . ."

"You didn't *hear* the laughter?" asked Radford.

Steven jumped.

"Good God! No!" he cried explosively.

A thought struck him the next instant. He shifted his position so that he could see Radford's face more plainly. It was pale and rather sober, but quiet. Steven put the question he had in his mind.

"Have *you* ever . . . heard things?" he said.

He thought Radford's glance and words decidedly evasive.

"Oh, one fancies one hears and feels all sorts of things in an old place like this—when one's alone," he wound up with a smile at Steven.

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The latter didn't say anything for some moments. Then he hooked his arm in Radford's again.

"I tell you, old man," he remarked with conviction, as they went up the steps together, "Melany's right. The sooner you clear out of this place, the better for you and for her."

"You think," said Radford, this time with a smile that was very odd, Steven thought, "that I'm in danger of becoming 'obsessed'?"

"I don't know what I think, as I've told you before," retorted Steven; "but I've an all-overish *feeling* that there's 'something not just good' in the place—call it 'ghosts,' 'thought,' 'association,' what you like—especially for *you*, old boy."

"Why, especially for me?" asked Radford, with another of those odd smiles—"secretive," Steven called them in his mind.

"Because," he replied, after a second's thought, "you've got that dashed funny thing, 'imagination.' Now I haven't a serimption; so if I'm affected by the queer old place—thick-hided as I am by nature, thank the Lord!—you must be a lot more so."

"I'm affected by it in so far as to love it," said Radford quietly, looking out over the terraced lawns dappled with moonlight. "I rather think I'm more 'affected' by giving it up, than by staying in it."

Steven stood looking at him in silence. The idea had come to him that perhaps Radford's stay alone at "Her

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Wish" had something to do with that heart trouble of his. For the first time in his busy, jovial life, he wondered if, after all, there might be a grain of fact in the mountain of nonsensical rubbish that he called "spook twaddle"—whether, perhaps, some peculiarly organised people didn't now and then "see things." To bring it down to the particular point at which he had just then arrived, whether, if such were the case, Radford, who was certainly peculiarly organised, hadn't "seen something"—and more than once—at "Her Wish."

Blanc's appearance in the doorway with his suave, "*Monsieur est servi*," came like a personal intervention of the God of Commonsense. There was something in the solidity of a good dinner to which a practical man beset by shadows could turn as to a rock of refuge.

"Come along, old boy," he said to Radford in another voice. "Let's have a good meal, a good drink, and a good sleep. This spooky mixture of lightning and moonlight has got us positively drivelling. Here's to tomorrow's sunlight . . . to your wedding-day, old bridegroom!" he ended, tossing off at a gulp the cocktail that Blanc was patiently extending.

## XXVII

STEVE," said Radford two hours later, as they were parting for the night at his bedroom door, "there's something I'd like you to realise rather particularly to-night."

"Eh? Well?" said Steven.

"It's just . . ." Radford halted, "that I think rather more of you than I would of half-a-dozen brothers."

Steven plumped a huge hand down on his shoulder, shaking him a little, as one dog "worries" another in fun.

"Old donkey," he said affectionately, "you're in a funk about to-morrow—that's what."

"No," said Radford seriously, "I'm not in a funk about anything. I just wanted you to know, somehow."

Steven took a glance at the pale, sober young face, then gave the shoulder on which his hand still rested, a painful squeeze.

"Same here, Evan," he said gruffly. Then he put up his other hand to Radford's other shoulder and turned him so that he faced him. "Now, look here," he said, "I've been watching you all the evening, my young friend. You're what I should call overstrung. You

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just make a break for the Land of Nod and stay there till you're called in the morning, will you?"

Radford nodded.

"Good-night, Steve," he said. As they shook hands for "good-night" he added, turning into his room: "Don't forget what I said just now . . . ever . . . will you?"

"Oh, you sentimental infant, go to bed!" responded Steven, in a sort of muffled roar. He felt uncomfortably choky, somehow. Pushing the slight figure before him quite into the room, he drew to the door behind it. "Go to bed!" he called again, with his mouth at the crack.

From within an "All right" answered him. He went off down the passage to his own room with an unpleasantly tight feeling about his heart. He decided that the queer, unseasonable, sultry day, and the still queerer and more sultry evening had got them both upset. Besides, not only bridegrooms but "best men," who happened also to be best friends, were apt to be upset on wedding eves. He scrambled out of his clothes and into bed with depressed irritation, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

Radford, on the contrary, not only made no preparation for going to bed, but hadn't the slightest intention of doing so. His every nerve told him that this was to be the night of his most intense, his most carefully,

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self-guarded vigil. If ever that presence were going to manifest itself again, something told him as surely as though a voice had spoken it, that this would be the night.

He felt rather tired: the long, stifling day, his interview with Melany, his decision to give up "Her Wish," the drawn-out evening with Steven, during which he had to keep such close guard over his words and manner, lest they should "give him away"—all this had told on him. Without undressing, he lay down on the bed, his hands under his head in the way that rested him most, his eyes on the graceful shadows of vines on the thin window curtains now silvery with moonlight. As a rule there was the most delicious rustling of leaves from the tulip-trees just outside, but to-night there was not a breath astir, not a sound except that incessant, orchestral stridor of insects, as if millions of tiny elves were playing without pause on flutes and violins. The sound was so continuous, indeed, that it finally wove itself into the fabric of silence: the accustomed ear was no longer conscious of it, so that it seemed the woof of which silence is the warp, just as those glittering filaments which spangle the extremest gloom seem the woof of darkness.

He lay there, quite tranquilly, sure that if she were coming it would be only after the house was still with that after-midnight stillness which to some sensitive people is so remindful of the silence of tombs. He won-



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dered a little, however, why he felt so perfectly sure that she *would* come to-night. Doubtless it was that soft laugh that had been so sweetly without malice and yet so mocking, when he had said "Good-bye" aloud . . . Yes, it was that, of course. She might even then have been coming, if Steven's great shout hadn't shattered the delicate moment. Perhaps, about one o'clock, he would rise and go down again into the "Ghost Garden" . . . A lovely name that, by the way . . . like a poem; she herself was so poetically the ghost to haunt a garden . . . with that magical perfume of ghostly roses always enfolding her . . . As for the explanation . . . such things were no more to be explained than electricity, or timeless-space, or God . . . Men gave names to them . . . that was all. Who really knew what gravitation was? Who had ever known? Not Newton! Long before that old fellow in the Bible—who was it? Job, David?—had said "a spirit passed before mine eyes and the hair of my flesh stood up," such appearances had passed before the eyes of men . . . some hideous, some beautiful like his elusive lady. He recalled dreamily the odd anger that Steve had roused in him by calling her face "infernal"—by likening her to a "Vampire". . . Well—he smiled to himself in the moonlit gloom—wilfulness is properly "infernal" in a way, since according to scripture it created the "Inferno" . . . And she was wilful—oh, she was wilful! even as a phantom . . . one felt that . . . rather . . . one needed all one's will in

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confronting her . . . needed to cling to it desperately—not to be drawn up by the roots, as it were, out of the firm ground of everyday . . .

He remembered now his strange dream of her the night he had spent in the hammock . . . recalled his sensation of clinging to the stiffened cord of his will, like a man to a steel rope above the glassy funnel of a whirlpool that is so swift it seems still . . .

He wondered, lying there,—watching the moonlight steal more and more into the room, spread in a silver pool upon the floor—if it *had* been only a dream. If it had not . . . and if he had not resisted so determinedly . . . what would have happened? Would he have found himself in it, with her? And what did he mean by “it”? In that weird cavern of iridescent gossamer? . . . In another world . . . another “state of being” perhaps? And what then? Would he have “returned”? Or would he have been what is called “dead,” yet knowing himself so tremendously “alive”? And why did he seem to feel that he would have known himself to be, what he thought of as “tremendously” alive? It came, he decided after some moments spent in pondering it, from his sense of *her* as being so tremendously, even terrifically, alive. It was there—the whole thing. His fear, not of her exactly, but the current that she brought with her, that she came on, rather,—like the mermaid he had once imagined on her tidal wave . . .

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He wondered, suddenly, what time it was, and how long he had been thus half drowsily musing. Somehow, he felt awfully lazy in spite of being so wide awake. Reaching out his hand, he felt for his watch on the little table nearby. It had been his father's—an old-fashioned chronometer that struck the hours, quarters, and minutes when one pressed a spring. With its small, crystalline notes it told him now that it was half-past one. Still he did not move . . . it was so delicious to lie there in the moonlit room thinking over his queer fairy tale. He had a mutinous feeling that if she wanted him she must come to him . . . It was her "last chance" . . . He wouldn't seek her any more . . . Let her come if she chose . . .

His eyes closed for an instant; but only for an instant. They were wide enough the next. There had wafted to him a fragrance of damask roses, a fragrance strangely mingled with another that he couldn't quite remember—something very faint, yet heady and exotic. . . . There was no breeze, or he would have thought it had blown to him from the garden. Strung sharply now, awake and alert, he sprang to the edge of the bed and sat sideways, listening.

There were two doors to his room, one opening on the main hall, one into the passage at the other end of which was Steven's bedroom. Why he should have fixed so certainly upon the door leading to the main hall, he couldn't tell; but as he sat, tense and breathless, gazing

## THE GHOST GARDEN 233

at it, the other door opened softly, and before he could turn to face it she had glided through and was standing in the moonlight opposite the bed.

He gasped for the sheer beauty of the apparition. She had never seemed to him before so utterly phantom-like and yet so real. It was as if she had clothed herself in the moonbeams, in a web of them held together by silver threads, crusted, stiff with them. There was a veil of them about her head more diaphanous, and through its folds the marvellous red of her hair flamed even in the cold light that quenches colour. That new fragrance, faint and exotic, floated towards him, clung delicately, like a web finer than that the ancients called "woven wind"; he was under its invisible tent with her, closed in as by some magic vapour less tangible than the hues one sees in a waking dream. And with it there came reminiscence, vague yet poignant—a sense of something that had once been realer than the hour itself . . . a memory as of things forgotten but once dearer than life . . . a pang of the heart-strings wilder than grief, wilder than joy . . . an ecstasy, unreasoning, unrelated to reason—the lift within him as of some prisoned self that he had once known, and lost all knowledge of, yet that was the very self of his very self, the innermost vital spark of him, the flame that burns when all else is ashes. And this self of his self, fluent like flame, bent towards her as if blown by a strong wind that came from measureless spaces, that streamed towards spaces as measureless . . .

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Somewhere far, far away—or was it in the depths?—he knew there was a thing called “will”—*his* will. . . . And like a man seeking to force his way down through waters grown dense from sheer depth, he struggled to reach it. It was as if some part of him almost numb had yet the power to tell him that unless he grasped that thing called “will” he would never again reach the surface of this deep that weltered over him. . . . Then with a shudder of all his being, like the shudder of a ship dragged backward by the same wave that sent her on a reef, he felt the spell loosing him, relaxing. . . . He was conscious with another consciousness . . . knew that this consciousness *was* his will.

With drenched forehead and heart labouring, he stood gazing at her—meeting, with all the power of the will which he seemed to have recovered from ultimate depths, her dark, ineluctable eyes. But they no longer commanded; they implored—it was as if they beseeched him for something which was hers and yet which he possessed . . . as if she were pleading for her own but for something as much his as hers. . . . And as he stood, bruising his own spirit with the iron of his will bent against her, she turned, with an infinite soft melancholy of drooped head and listless arms, away from him. He tried to call out to her, but his tongue was tied. He took a step towards her, and at that she turned her head, and raised again to his, her imploring eyes. And again there floated to him that faint yet piercing fragrance.

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. . . And it was as if he had known both it and her from time immemorial. . . . Where or how, he could not remember—only that she had implored him then as now; and then as now, it had been his will alone that stood between them.

A blackness came before his eyes. He struck at it with his hand as though it were a cloth that had fallen over them. It passed and he saw clearly. The room was empty of her. . . .

Then a great pang seized him; he cried out like a man parting with his soul, and rushed headlong to the door, along the hall, down the staircase—following like a hound by the scent of that faint fragrance.

He saw her again, passing across the terrace towards the rose-garden. He could hear the rustle of her skirts stiff with silver threads that caught the moonlight. The veil that was like a bride's, dimmed the outline of her figure. She was real . . . yet she was like a moonlit cloud floating before him. . . . He must know. . . . He must know. . . . His will held her now. She must not withdraw again until she had told him what she implored. . . . Until she had yielded him her secret. . . . And as he held her with his will . . . drawing her back from her strange escape . . . he saw, as it were, fine iridescent cobwebs, spread upon the grass where she had passed along . . . floating filaments that barred his way like strands of gossamer. . . .

Now they had reached the rose-garden: even in that

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wild moment he noticed how a rose, brushed by her passing, swayed as from a human contact. He had the sense of holding her by his will as by a fine, strong thread.

When she came to the slender grave . . . *her* grave . . . she passed to the other side, then turned and again confronted him; but her face was hidden now by the transparent, moony veil that enveloped her from head to foot. White flowers held this veil in place—small flowers with golden hearts—orange-blossoms. . . . She was dressed like a bride. On the swimming immensity of the moment, their fragrance drifted to him, faint yet piercing, subtly honeyed and alluring as the thought of kisses given and returned on the brink of some sweet death. . . .

The thread by which he held her seemed now finer than a star's spinning . . . less tangible than a ray of sound too swiftly vibrant for mortal hearing . . . seemed indeed the ineffable filament by which his own spirit was held to his quaking flesh.

And thus knit to her by the same impalpable bond with which he held her, and which though impalpable was yet strong as the invisibility which binds the spheres to their courses, he felt himself alone with her in a supernal vast, where the one only other thing was his will to hold her, to look again upon her face and read its secret. . . .

Suddenly, with a gesture swift and strangely royal, she put back her veil. In the dark eyes, heavy a little as with the opiate of secret dreams, there was no longer any shadow of imploring. Full of a mystic arrogance, an

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exquisite, soft malice—languid, deliberate and imperious—they dwelt on his with a look as sovereign as had been the air of her unveiling. For a moment that seemed an immortality, those still, immutable eyes fixed him with their resistless gaze; then, slowly, delicately, she smiled: And this smile, exultant and ensorcelling, seemed not only for him, but for the idea of death—as she glowed there with a splendour that dimmed such feeble life as could be touched by death—the marvellous, living ghost, standing triumphant over her own grave. . . .

In a flash of mingled ecstasy and terror, that wild vertigo of the spirit was upon him . . . as if he were poised on the brink of a measureless abyss . . . as if he were being drawn toward it by some power stronger than life or death . . . as if she were herself the abyss that drew him . . . as if what he possessed and that was yet hers was that very self of the very self in him that bent towards her fluent like flame. . . . And all at once—he knew that the will he clung to had turned against him, that he had fallen on his own will as on a sword; for it was his own will that sent him to her, step by step, nearer, nearer, until he touched airy hands that clung, that drew him to the heart of mystery—to the ultimate, innermost solution . . . to a rapture that was death and yet was at the same time life exorbitant. . . .



## XVIII

**T**HAT night, the eve of her wedding day, when Radford had left her to return to "Her Wish," Melany went upstairs and leaned at her open window, feeling that she should be very happy, and yet, in spite of this feeling and all her will set on it, she was not happy. Something vaguer than doubt, neither as hot nor as cold as fear, rose softly like a mist within her, dimming joyousness.

She thought that it must be the mood, half sad, half glad, that comes to maidens on their wedding eves, that wistfulness with which one says farewell to something dear when one is about to turn from it forever although to something dearer. This Melany that was herself would not be any more after to-morrow, not just this Melany, not ever any more. There had been another time when she had said good-bye to herself, a self that was never to be again. It was when her voice had been taken from her. For a long time after that she had felt as if her voice had been her soul, and there was nothing left in her that could hope or pray or desire. Then love had been given her, and her soul which was only sleeping had wakened and lifted within her. Then she had

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longed for her lost voice with a different longing. It seemed to her then that no words of hers could ever utter her love, only the voice that she had lost. And something else happened that was very strange: it was the feeling that even if her voice were to be given back, she could never use it for any lesser thing than the expression of her love or the gladness that love had brought her.

Yet, to-night that gladness was subdued. It lay within her breast pale and listless. There was even a heaviness about it, so that though it was still gladness, it was as if half asleep. Then with a pang she realised that she had drawn pleasure from her lover's sacrifice. She had been so glad when he had said that he would sell "Her Wish" that she had not stopped to think how it must hurt him to part with it. She recalled his eyes and voice now as they seemed when he had told her, and she could hear again her own cry of delight. Yes, now that she looked back calmly, putting aside her selfish pleasure, she knew that there had been no pleasure in his eyes or voice. They had been very kind and gentle, but . . . yes, now that she remembered without the veil of her own feeling to blur them, they had not been glad. And suddenly it seemed to her as if she had set him far away from her by being joyful because of something that grieved him. She felt as if she couldn't wait to tell him how sorry she was, as if she must go now, running all the way to "Her Wish" to tell him that he needn't give it up, that she didn't want him to make a sacrifice

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for her at the very beginning of their life together. . . .

She turned eagerly towards the door, then stopped, remembering another thing. This was the last evening of her girlhood, she must spend it with her father. Besides, it would seem very queer if she went to "Her Wish" now. Even he would think it a strange thing for her to do. . . . And there were Steven and Blanc to consider. . . .

She went slowly downstairs to rejoin her father, hoping that no shadow of her inner distress would steal into her face against her will, while she was with him. Then, as she was about to open the door of the living-room, a gleam of thought came, chasing away the shadows. She would tell Evan to-morrow; she would give him back "Her Wish" on their wedding morning. . . .

It was nearly midnight before she left her father and returned to her own room. Through the window which she had left with shutters and curtains pushed back, she could see the whole sweep of sky above "Her Wish" sewn with stars and pulsant with summer lightning. She undressed, then knelt beside the window again and leaned with her arms on its sill, gazing towards the place of her dread, thinking how wonderful was love that could conquer such dread, and of how Evan would smile to-morrow when she told him of it. But even as she thought this, that dread began to mount again within her, slow, stealthy, sure, a dark tide of the spirit. The wild beauty of the night seemed to hold something bale-

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ful, to portend some evil orgasm of hidden forces. The lightning was like silent, mocking laughter, convulsing the charged air, and surely the heat had terribly increased. It came billowing down above her, fold upon fold, until she felt smothered in a huge mantle of plumage under which she struggled for breath. . . .

She rose to her feet, bringing out of the impression which had almost overwhelmed her, one clear thought. She must conquer her dread now, here, if she was ever to conquer it.

"It's this fearful heat," she said to herself. "If I could only plunge into cool water . . . running water. . . ."

At the same moment a vivid picture floated before her. Just beyond the garden, near the edge of the woods, there was a deep pool overhung by willows, and the picture that she saw against her closed eyelids was of this pool, clear and onyx coloured in the moonlight. . . .

Throwing a light cloak over her night-dress, she stole from the house and down through the garden. It was wonderful to be out of doors at midnight. Already she could breathe more freely. The dread was lifting from her. She came to the quiet pool, and looking in saw the mild stars reflected, and the arrogant moon trembling a little in her watery heaven. As she gazed the lightning quickened beyond the stars, and a golden shiver ran across the pool, but it no longer seemed sinister, only magically lovely. She loosened her hair, and slipping off

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her night-dress, stood slim and pearly against the background of pale foliage and clear water. It seemed to her fitting and beautiful to bathe thus in living water on her wedding eve, among the reflections of stars and moon and summer lightning.

The soil here was sandy, not red as on the higher lands of "Her Wish," and the pool was lined with fine white gravel.

She stooped and let the water close above her. Deliciously it clasped her, washing away the last traces of her dread. Rising again she swam languidly for a few strokes, then floated, her arms stretched out behind her head. It was exquisite to rest like this on the cool, elastic element. It was as if she were being gently rocked by a current of ineffable peace. The lustral waters purified her body and her spirit from fever. The sky seemed full now of benediction. She thought that she could almost hear the music of the stars . . . and she sent upward to them, with her look, a prayer for which she could not have found words, so mingled was it of feelings for which there are no words. . . .

It was nearly one o'clock before she lay down upon her bed, sinking immediately into a profound sleep. But she had not slept more than a few minutes when with a bound she was on her feet again. The very violence of this bound from the soft depths of sleep into a wakefulness so sharp and cutting that she seemed to have alighted on edged flints, dashed away from her for an

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instant the memory of what it was that had so fiercely roused her. The next, it crashed down on her like the collapse of a suspended wave, that falls all the harder for its brief pause.

She had seen him, Evan (she *knew* that she had seen him, not only dreamed of him), with the rigid expressionless face of a corpse, yet moving swiftly, the eagerness of his body contrasting horribly with that still, death-mask of his face—moving swiftly towards some appalling danger. And this danger was drawing him along the upper terrace of "Her Wish" . . . down the path that led to the Ghost Garden . . . to that grave. . . . Yet, in her vision, though he was going so swiftly along that familiar path, it seemed to wind on one side above a sheer abyss, as if the earth there had been rent in half, and that gulf was the edge of the world, and below only soundless space and quenched stars. . . .

She dressed in a frenzy of haste, that left her damp hair hanging about her shoulders, and now and then heart-breakingly frustrated itself. But at last she was out in the night again running at full speed across the lawn. The old setter gave an excited nocturnal bark, then rushed after her. She did not hear him or know that he was following.

Evan was in danger . . . in danger . . . in danger . . . and what this danger was she *knew*. That was the one thought in her brain, but she herself, her whole self, mind, soul and body, was flaming with a will that had

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been re-kindled as by the stroke of a sword of flame. She was not the Melany that Radford had known, as she ran, tense and gathered to the height of her being, through the strange, suffocating night. She felt dread, inconceivably greater than any she had yet known, but she felt no fear. There was in her, she was exultantly aware, a power of light that throbbed to fling itself against the power of darkness. She did not even fear to be too late. The same power that had wrenched her out of sleep would see that she got to him in time. And now she seized other thoughts and sent them flashing before her, like flights of arrows. She shot to him her keen, sharp-pointed thoughts, hurling them by some wild energy of the spirit, so that to her they seemed to take form and coruscate against the air as they sped from her: "Wait for me. . . . Wait for me. . . . I am love. . . . I am love. . . . I am love. . . . I hold you fast. . . . Wait for me. . . . Wait for me. . . ." But now wild fantasies began to swarm about her mind. She imagined herself with both hands clenched in the streaming hair of a comet, striving with might and main to restrain it from its headlong course. She was grasping the foamy hem of a retreating tide. . . . She dragged it an inch backwards and the moon staggered in the sky, as though the hem of her garment had been tugged awry. She was holding in both arms the vast column of black smoke that was an escaping genie. . . . And the smoke looped downwards and pressed upon her malignantly so that her

breath choked in her throat and her eyes swelled and burnt. . . .

Then suddenly the whirling images dissolved, and she was conscious only of her steady, flaming will again, and the beat of her heart that said: "Wait for me. . . . Wait for me. . . ."

Now she had left the avenue of firs, and was flying up the terraced lawn as she had once flown down it, when a child, from that terrible portrait. Some tense chord in her twanged with ecstasy, as she knew that now she was rushing towards the more terrible reality, and was not afraid of it, longed to come near it, to measure her strength against its strength, that power of light in her against its power of darkness.



## XIX

**I**T was that last stretch up the slanting lawns of "Her Wish" that brought her to sudden consciousness of her body as of a hard-driven animal that was failing her. There was a hot constriction across her chest, her throat and mouth were parched, her breast laboured. Light and agile as she was by nature, the headlong, unaccustomed run of more than a mile over uneven ground had taxed her forces to the utmost. She felt, during that last hundred yards to the upper terrace, as though the clogging medium of nightmare stayed her, as though she were struggling up a hill spread with bird lime. A pang like the sharp curve of a sickle caught her in the side. She was forced to halt a second, gasping hard; and in this second of arrestment, the old dog, that although panting heavily had kept up with her, ran a yard ahead, then stiffened suddenly and growled, his scruff bristling.

She got her breath again and ran on, but the dog, whimpering uneasily, fell behind, darting now to the right, now to the left, snuffing and questing as though seeking some means of egress through a sudden barrier.

When she had mounted the last step that led to the terrace, she saw that it was empty. Below her the setter was still whining and circling. She turned and,

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again running, went down the path to the rose-garden. As she reached the arbour that divided it from the lawns, the dog, plunging through the box-hedge, joined her again. He was shivering violently, and the hair all along his back stood on end. When he saw her begin to descend the steps, he lifted his grey muzzle and howled dolorously, but didn't follow. Back and forth he darted at the head of the steps, baying his terrified anguish, just as a person who cannot swim, rushes shrieking back and forth along the edge of water in which some one is drowning. Dogs near and far began to answer him. Their howling went up in dismal chorus through the moonlit air.

But Melany was aware of nothing except the will to be in time, to find Evan, to save him, to hold him back from that terrible grasp which was drawing him as the moon draws the tide, which she *felt* drawing him, as if her own heart-strings wound with his stretched and ached under the frightful tension with which his were being drawn apart from them. Suddenly, as the dog had done, she became aware of a barrier across her way, a veil as of soft impenetrable stuff that choked her with invisible folds. All seemed grey about her, vague, formless. She could no longer tell where she was. The foliage and blossoms of roses were on every side, towering unnaturally like a shadow forest. She plunged into tangles of thorny boughs, stumbled on the soft loam of the heaped beds. Her mind spun wildly like the mind of

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one falling from a great height, and now for the first time she heard that desolate howling, full of helpless terror, of desperate imploring. . . .

In some strange way, the homely sound brought back her sense of reality. She clenched all her being against the insidious soft force that had closed about her like a gigantic cobweb, broke free from it, realised that she was in the ring of rose-trees that guarded the grave, and ran forward crying his name. The next instant she saw him. He had fallen forward on the low mound, with arms outstretched as though embracing it. . . .

Her love found strength to turn him so that she could look into his face, to lift his face against her breast, as she stretched herself beside him, leaning for support against the dreadful grave. Though his face was as she had seen it in her vision, she refused, with a sort of wild righteousness of wrath, to believe him dead. This was something even more awful than death that had overcome him, something which she in her turn must overcome. The cheek which she touched piteously was very cold, so were his hands. She could not find the pulse in his limp wrist. There was no stir at his heart when she felt for it, and his breast under the shirt that she had opened was cold like his hands and face. Yet she was sure that he wasn't dead; so sure, that there swept over her the conviction that here and now was to be the great battle of the power of light in her against the power of darkness that strove to overwhelm him. As this convic-

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tion came to her, there came also the sense of that presence from which for so long she had been shut out. Personal, tremendous, implacable, it rose there before her, as real, though invisible, as the senseless body she clasped so jealously; confronting her across it, mocking her with the assurance which no words could have made clearer, that it was but the shell she clasped, while with that presence was the spirit that had dwelt in it. . . . At the same time she felt her own being transfused with one immeasurably greater, yet which was also hers. It was as if she quickened beyond her normal consciousness, transcended her body, became, in her turn, a presence, tremendous and implacable.

For a moment she was all exultation; then, with an indescribable anguish, she felt that darkness stealing over her like a cloud driven by some resistless, steady wind. The new self into which she had been so gloriously lifted seemed dwindling, sinking inward like a spent flame. . . . She gathered all her strength and uttered it in one cry: "Evan!"

The darkness thinned. She was sure she saw a quiver in his sealed eyelids. She called him again. Then her voice failed her. A hand seemed to shut her throat. She crouched fierce but paralysed, while the darkness swelled again, billowing over her. . . . And now the new life, the new will, in her flared again, thin as a spray of fire, but rising, rising, higher than any shadow, piercing that violent darkness, severing it. And sud-

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denly she knew, beyond doubt, that the evil power was divided by her effort against it, that it could not bend its full force on her without releasing somewhat its hold of Evan. With this knowledge came a transformation in her conception of the unseen. It was not only a dark power that she fought, but that power condensed into the form of a woman, one who, if her inner eyes could discern the intangible, would be there before her, visible, actual to the last strand of her burning hair, who *was* there before her, though unseen, against whose terrible desire she was measuring the might of her love. And even in the horror of this realisation, she felt a wild joy, the joy of one who has been a coward and who faces the supreme test with no faintest thrill of cowardice.

Her only fear was that she might fail him, that her love might not prove strong enough. . . . "Love is strong as death." . . . How often she had said it! . . . But this was more than death that she strove against. . . . Her love must be stronger than death to conquer it. . . . As she thought this, that dark will surged upon her, until the inner light that was her weapon concentrated to a point. And now her consciousness was strangely shifted. This atom of supernal brilliance that she seemed both to see and feel, was no longer within her, but she was contained in it as in the centre of a circle that had no circumference. . . . And all at once she knew that this was the inmost

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heart of the love that is stronger than death . . .  
 Smaller than small . . . greater than great . . . that  
 moves not, yet is swifter than thought. . . . The light  
 that is beyond darkness. . . . Very light of very light.  
 . . . Was she remembering, or listening to great  
 voices? In this centre of being that was both infinite  
 and infinitesimal, she became somehow aware that to  
 be safe she had only to be still, quite still, holding him  
 there with her by her love that was part of the love that  
 is stronger than death or evil; only to be still, quite  
 still, with a stillness that was unbroken love . . . with  
 love that was light continuous from eternity to eternity  
 . . . without end as without beginning. Light that en-  
 gulfed like darkness . . . that consumed all things . . .  
 even her personality and his. . . . She was becoming this  
 light. . . . Thought was dissolving . . . memory. . . .  
 There was only light. . . . Now she no longer knew it  
 as separate from darkness, or herself as separate from  
 it. . . . She was blended with it . . . dissolved in it  
 like a drop of water in an illimitable sea. . . . And in  
 this sea of light, one with it also, was Evan. . . . And  
 he was safe. . . .

It was past three o'clock when the old setter, discour-  
 aged by his unavailing appeal from the head of the  
 garden steps, wandered forlornly to the house and be-  
 gan whimpering and scratching at the front door. As  
 no one answered he relaxed exhaustedly upon his  
 haunches and took up again his plaintive refrain.

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Roused by this incessant howling so near the house, Blanc, unable to sleep again, got up and went downstairs to drive the dog away. No sooner had he opened the door, however, than the howling ceased, and old "Clip," all one glad wag from nose to tail-tip, fawned upon him. Blanc recognised him at once as the dog that so often followed Melany to "Her Wish."

The shortest way to settle the matter, he thought, would be to invite Clip to spend the night inside the house; but the dog suddenly rushed from him, looking back as he did so and giving short, excited barks. Then stopping short, and looking back, he waited as if begging him to follow. When he found that he continued to stand in the doorway, calling in an undertone and snapping his fingers for him to return, he ran back, but this time to leap upon him with loud, imploring whines, and a second later rushed off, repeating his former manœuvres.

"*Bigre!*" muttered Blanc in sleepy astonishment. "*C'est curieux ça!*"

As he still hesitated, Clip came to a stand within a yard or two, and lifting his nose began to howl again. Before Blanc could make up his mind what to do, Steven joined him, a stick in his hand and wrath on his countenance. Blanc explained; and Steven's angry look changed first into surprise, then into uneasiness. What on earth could have happened at Hilton, to send the old dog here at this time of night? He called Clip, who

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came eagerly fawning and uttering anxious whines, then ran off again, looking back and halting just as he had done with Blanc.

"*C'est bien étrange, Monsieur, n'est ce pas?*" the man said, watching Steven's face, and beginning himself to feel a queer uneasiness.

"It is," Steven assented. "It is so deucedly strange that I am going to get into my clothes and follow him. Keep him here till I come back, then dress and be ready in case anything's really the matter."

He returned shortly in rough and ready attire of trousers and coat over his pyjamas, and bare feet thrust into tennis shoes.

"Now then, old boy," he said to Clip, who, yelping with joy as he saw himself understood, darted not in the direction of Hilton, to Steven's great astonishment, but toward the rose-garden. As he followed he muttered as Blanc had done: "That's curious. . . ."

Back and forth before him, Clip ran, to make sure he was being followed, until they reached the arbour leading to the garden steps. Here he halted, whimpering uneasily, snuffing at the air, before beginning to descend, which he did with apprehensive rigidity, checking on each step, and quickly, gingerly lifting his feet as if from a surface that he didn't trust. Once in the garden, however, he seemed to overcome his instinctive dread, and, nose to ground, dashed off without any more hesitation. He went so fast, indeed, that Steven



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lost sight of him for a moment along the turnings of the path. A little after, one loud joyous bark sounded from the depths of the rose-trees, but changed the next instant into a long-drawn wail of utter dismay and grief.

The moon, though westering, was still wonderfully brilliant. It showed Steven that group of man and woman and dog, huddled against the slender grave. He thought at first that both Radford and the girl were dead. But as he knelt down beside them, Melany's eyelids lifted, and she began to murmur words that for a time he couldn't make out, his pulses were beating so thickly against his ears. At last he understood. She was saying monotonously, reiterating, as if the words were a spell that her voice must keep weaving, "He isn't dead. . . . He isn't dead. . . . He isn't dead . . ."

Steven gazed into his friend's face, laid his hand on his forehead, drew it back shivering.

"He isn't dead. . . . He isn't dead . . ." chaunted the low untiring voice, while the old dog crouched and trembled, nuzzling closer. Steven fought down horror. There was something so dark, so mysterious in their being here together, here beside this grave. All the vague apprehension of something secret and menacing, that the evening before had clouded his mood, gathered again. There was something in all this, more sinister, bitterer than the immemorial tragedy of death. There was, too, mingled with it, the threat of a catastrophe

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that crept slowly towards a piling up of horrors; for it seemed to him that in the girl's spent voice and eyes was the shadow of insanity. . . . He spoke to her now with the cajoling softness of one addressing a child in the clutch of nightmare.

"You must be so tired, dear. . . . Let me take him. . . . Your poor arms must be all numb and cramped . . ."

When this appeal won no response from her, he changed it into another: "My dear . . . I think it would be better to put his head lower . . . it's very bad for him to lie with his head raised like that . . ."

This brought her eyes to his with a look of fright. "You think I'm hurting him? He isn't dead. . . . He isn't dead . . ."

"Yes, yes . . . that's it," Steven stammered incoherently. "It's bad for any one who is . . . who is unconscious, to lie with the head lifted . . ."

At this she tried to withdraw her arms, but they were so stiff that he had to help her. While he was doing so, Blanc came up. Steven broke in on the man's cry of dismay, with a sharp order.

"Quick! Help me to carry your master to the house . . ."

But at this. Melany sprang to her feet, turning on him a face unreal with passion, with an abnormal vehemence of wrath that struck him as not least of the moment's dreadfulness.

"No, never!" she said in a voice he did not recog-

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nise. "Never to that house. . . . He shall be taken home . . . to my home . . . where I can guard him from *her* . . ."

Not until Steven promised, and sent Blanc off to make arrangements for the removal of the dead man to Hilton, did she relax again, or her face resume its usual gentleness. Kneeling then, with Radford's hand held in both her own against her breast, she began murmuring to him: "You aren't dead, dearest. . . . You aren't dead. . . . You aren't dead. . . ."

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### XXX

**T**HERE followed three days which for Steven represented the steady ascent of tragedy to a pitch of ghastliness almost insufferable.

When Radford's body had been brought to Hilton, Melany continued her watch beside it, with the same inflexible determination, the same unshakable belief in his being alive. Her cheek to his, her arms about him, she talked to him incessantly in that low, earnest murmur, as if her words were a spell that her voice must keep weaving.

Morning passed into afternoon and night, but still she knelt there. Nothing could induce her to leave him. She consented to drink a glass of milk that Steven brought her, only when he told her that unless she took some nourishment her strength would certainly fail no matter how fixed her will might be. It hurt him to see with what almost fierce eagerness she drank it then.

Dr. Borridge arrived shortly after sunset. He had no more influence with her than the others. It was only when her father, after vainly appealing to her, broke down in tears that she consented to withdraw for a few moments so that the doctor might make the necessary efforts to restore Radford to consciousness. This

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at least was the merciful way in which it was put to her. In reality, there had been no doubt in Borridge's mind from the first glance at the white face on the pillow. His eyes had said as much to Steven. Still, as he added in words when the others had left the room, one must always make sure. His tests, however, proved his first impression to be correct. No blood answered the lancet, there was no dimming of the mirror held before the lips and nostrils.

He had scarcely laid the cold wrist down again and closed his instrument case, when Melany re-entered, quivering and defiant as if she guessed the verdict of their silence. But she said nothing, only went and knelt again beside the bed, taking up once more her low monotone of reassurance to the dead.

In the hall outside, to Steven and her father, Borridge spoke bluntly. Melany's condition he thought alarming. He would like a consultation. To attempt to remove her by force from the body (Steven set his teeth) might throw her into a dangerous state, and yet . . . here he hesitated, and yet . . . it might be worse for her to remain. The weather was unseasonably hot . . .

Steven turned short, and went out into the sultry night. A sick loathing horror at the whole scheme of nature heaved through him. On the wave of disgust his grief swam like a bit of flotsam, defiled by it. Then he fought clear of the brackish tide and knew that his grief

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was of the spirit, for the spirit. And at the thought of his dead friend, that spirit he had loved, tears cleansed his mood and for a little he forgot the horror threatening the deserted body, the horror of horrors as it would be for the poor girl clinging so desperately to it. . . .

At Borridge's request a great neurologist was wired for that evening. The night wore away, link by link, through its interminable length. Dawn came, and the sun, clearing the horizon, blazed with what to Steven seemed an obscene malignity of splendour, as if sucking up from the whole earth the fumes of our helpless mortality. A gruesome dread settled down upon him, choking him, the dread of nameless things. A man finding himself in a cemetery during an earthquake, might feel as Steven felt, the fear of death lessened by the fear of what the gaping earth might disclose. . . .

And still they were held fast by their terrible dilemma, to which there seemed no solution, for after several attempts to induce Melany to leave Radford's side, she turned on them at last with such an ecstasy of defiance that Borridge declared any more active insistence might cost her reason. . . .

A telegram came from the neurologist at midday, saying that he could not arrive till the following night. Steven and the doctor looked at each other. It was a grim look; on Steven's side it was also one of futile rage, but Borridge didn't misunderstand. He knew

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quite well that this rage wasn't directed against any person. He had seen that look before. All experienced physicians have. He went close to Steven and said quietly: "Don't rack your nerves over it. I'll anaesthetise her if it becomes . . . necessary."

Steven stared for a second, then sank down on a chair, queerly faint under the sudden relief from hourly growing horror.

"Yes, yes, relax . . . that's right," said Borridge, tapping his shoulder with medical benevolence of manner. He stood there tapping it absently for some moments. It had been easy to mention anaesthetics in that confident, scientifically superior tone, it had had its effect on the overwrought young man whose shoulder he was tapping; but inwardly he didn't feel the assurance that his tone had implied; inwardly he was confessing to himself that he had never had to face a professional situation half so painful and puzzling. To leave the girl with her lover's body until the abhorrent frankness of nature's way with what she wishes to transform to other uses became apparent, would certainly mean to leave her to ultimate madness; to remove her from it, even by the use of anaesthetics, might no less mean to snap the fine tension of her reason already strained to its limit. Yes, she still had her reason, though reasonableness was gone. It was impossible to argue with her, or persuade. To one idea, and one only, she clung with all the strength of her being: the

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belief that her lover was not dead, that he would finally revive, and that it was she only who could call him back to life. . . . This horrible, unseasonable weather! . . . If only some change would come, a storm, lowering the dense, sultry temperature. As yet, however, and he thanked a God unknown to science for the apparent miracle, no change had taken place in the still figure to which the girl clung so desperately. It lay there in austere tranquillity, with that strange, unique pallor, so often likened to wax and marble unblemished by even a shadow of that which they shudderingly apprehended. Perhaps . . . for one night more. . . .

The latter part of the night, Steven watched alone with Melany, while Borridge took a few hours' sleep to steady himself for the ordeal that must surely come with the next morning. He had suggested the day before, as a last possible escape from the dreaded issue with the girl, that she should not be offered nourishment. A natural collapse might save both her and them much suffering. But she seemed to have called to her need a superhuman power of endurance. The late moonlight slanting into the room disclosed to Steven her kneeling figure, vigilant and steady. Now and then she moved a little to ease her position, but there was no sign of faintness about her, and the low murmur went on and on ceaselessly, mingling with the reiterant noises of the summer night. . . . He could distinguish no words, only a soft cadence that rose and fell, with in-



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tonations of unwearying tenderness. He turned his face to the open window and shut out with his hands the sound that had become unendurable. . . . And the slow night wore away at last, and again the sun rose malevolently sovereign. . . .

It was at this hour of the sun's rising, that Melany called Radford by name in a wonderful, great voice that sent Steven to his feet as at the shock of an alarm bell. She was standing now, and had grasped both of Radford's hands in hers. Three times she called his name, and so imperious was the sound of that summoning voice that Steven stared breathless, feeling for one startled moment that the dead must answer; the next, he recollected himself and rushed forward. This must be the sign of the collapse for which Borridge had hoped. He reached the bedside in time, not as he expected to save Melany from falling, but to see Radford's eyelids quiver, then lift and from the deathlike face life look out through eyes darkly empty of all but life. . . .

The hours that followed this amazing resurrection (Steven could think of it as nothing less) were as painful in another way as had been the hours that preceded it; for now it was Radford's reason that seemed in danger, if not already gone beyond recall, left behind in that underworld or overworld from which his spirit had emerged to reclaim the body that science had pronounced dead. The situation had changed with amazing suddenness, and the girl, now in full possession

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of herself once more, found that the lover for whom she had wrestled with death seemed not to remember her, had indeed no memory of anything or person in his immediate surroundings. There was an anxious cloudiness in his eyes which still seemed focussed on some supersensible experience so tremendous that it held for him a reality which life lacked. Such broken sentences as he uttered were strange as this look in his eyes. He seemed at first to see and hear very indistinctly, murmuring that everything was "in fragments, in parts." "Where is the rest? . . . The other side of things? What's happened?" he kept asking. "There's nothing whole here, only halves . . . parts . . ."

Lifting his hand he let it fall again, a look of puzzled dismay coming over his face. "What's this heaviness I'm in? . . . Am I all heavy like that?" And he lay staring at his hand in a sort of horrified loathing, repeating over and over: "Why is it weighted down? . . . Why isn't it whole, and yet so dreadfully heavy?"

Borridge, taking a quiet, matter-of-fact tone, explained that he had been very ill, that it would be better for him just to lie still and not to trouble about anything, that his confusion was quite natural. Melany, who still knelt at his side, clasping his other hand, echoed the doctor's words, begging him to rest, that she would stay with him, that she wouldn't leave him till he wished her to. He lay as if listening, his eyes wearily closed, then asked for water. But when the glass was

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held to his lips and he had swallowed once or twice with apparent difficulty, he turned away his head muttering: "No. It isn't real water . . . it's heavy . . . solid . . ." The girl, not knowing how to answer, trying to humour him asked what he meant by real water. And he answered: "It satisfies . . . wholly . . . at once . . . it floats to you like music . . ." Then he corrected himself with petulance: "No. That's nonsense. Speaking makes me forget. Words are too heavy. You can't talk of *there* in terms of solids. . . . Oh, it's monstrous! . . . talking is. . . . Words. . . . Words. . . . Blocks of lead! . . . I haven't used them for ages . . . countless ages. . . . They break through my thoughts . . . tear them to shreds. . . . You can't hold lumps of lead in woven rainbows. . . . The sixth colour. . . . There it is in *words*! Do you understand? Of course you don't. . . . The sixth colour. . . . There's no word been made for it. . . . Its name is hidden. . . . It's the secret of space . . . timeless space. . . . Now you know . . ." he laughed weakly, opening his eyes an instant, "what you'll never know!" he ended with faint derision, and closed them again, lying motionless.

Borridge persuaded him, with Melany's aid, to take some nourishment and told him that he must not talk any more for the present if he wished to recover quickly. He then went into the next room to speak with Steven and Mr. Warrenger.

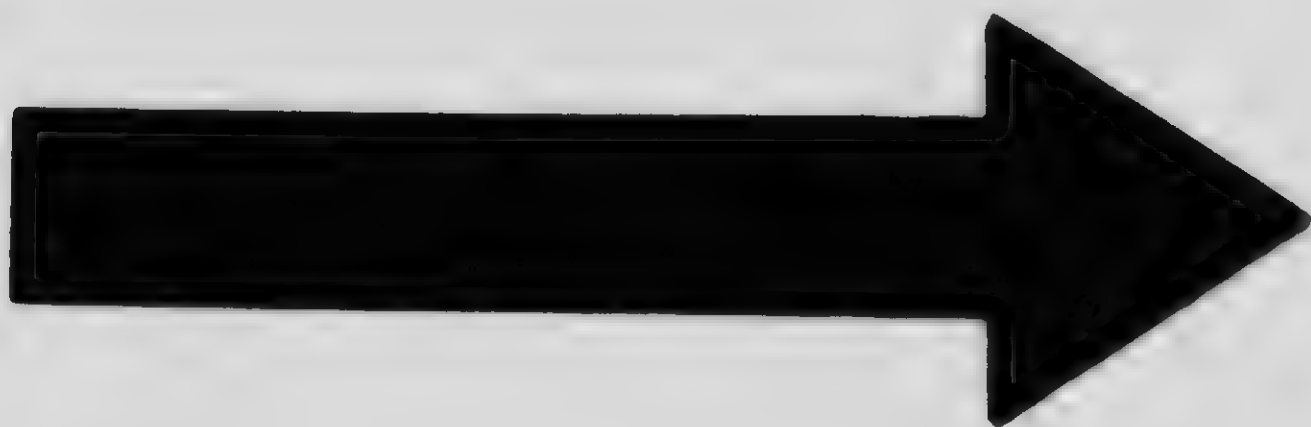
The girl, left alone with her lover, knelt gazing down

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at him, until one of the tears that she had so long repressed, crept down from under her lashes and fell upon his hand.

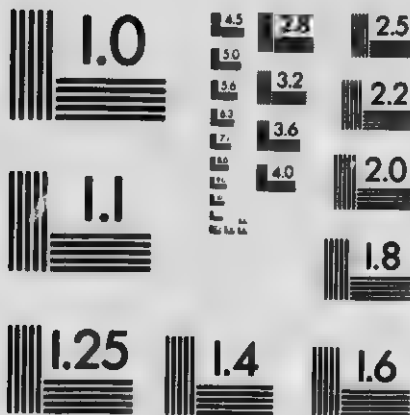
He started, opening his eyes and fixing them on the fallen tear. "How heavy it is! . . ." he muttered. "Like everything . . . *here*." Then with a sigh, half of weariness, half of exasperation at the gross inexplicableness of all about him, he closed his eyes and turned away his face again.

The girl took care that no second tear should fall, and he lay without speaking for some hours.



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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DR. ELLERSON, the great neurologist for whom they had telegraphed three days ago, arrived that evening at seven. Steven, who had gone to the station to meet him, was struck first of all by the fact, somehow disconcerting, that he looked utterly unlike all his preconceived ideas of what a famous neurologist *would* look like. He was a man of about fifty, very tall and of an almost Oriental darkness. There was, in fact, about his face, especially the brow and eyes, a modelling and an expression at the same time Greek and Asiatic. And these dark eyes, that never left Steven's face while he answered the first professional questions put to him by their owner, were penetrating yet reticent to an extraordinary degree. Steven had a strong impression that the personality behind them was manifold, and that Dr. Ellerson could have been celebrated for other things besides neurology had he chosen to direct his mind towards them. He felt all at once that there was hope for poor Evan, and that this hope lay in the power of the famous physician who looked so like one's idea of a poet or philosopher, or, rather, like both in one.

By the time they reached Hilton, Steven had given him a general account of the situation and the persons

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it involved, also the bare facts of Radford's latest seizure, its duration and his recovery of consciousness that morning. He didn't repeat, however, any of the strange things that Radford had said, merely stating, in answer to a question, that his mind had seemed much confused at first, and that since then he had relapsed into silence, merely opening his eyes now and then, only to close them again at once, "as if" Steven added, "the sight of everything and every one fretted him. He doesn't seem to remember us . . . not even Miss Warrenger. . . . Or if he does, it's as if we jarred on him . . . almost as if he resented coming to life again." Dr. Ellerson said nothing for a few moments, then he asked:

"How did Miss Warrenger happen to find him? Had she any reason for thinking he'd be in that particular spot? I should like to know something of what preceded this last collapse and . . ." he glanced at Steven rather shrewdly, "all the others."

Steven met the keen glance frankly.

"I'm going to ask you, sir," he answered "to get Miss Warrenger to tell you that. It's a rather queer story altogether, and she knows more about it than any one else."

"When you say queer," returned Ellerson, "do you mean psychic?"

Steven's quick look at him was like a start, and the great man smiled.



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"Trance is a mental state, you know," he explained; "and from what you've already told me, I gather that some fixed idea has produced it in your friend; so when you said 'queer,' I naturally thought of the ideas that we call psychic. Was Mr. Radford interested in such things?"

"In a way . . . yes," Steven admitted reluctantly. "But only of late."

"Of late?" asked Ellerson quickly. "Since how long is that?"

"A few months . . . about six months, I think."

"And Miss Warrenger? She shared this interest with him, I suppose?"

"Dr. Ellerson," pleaded Steven unhappily, "please wait and get her to tell you everything . . . I don't want to give you a false impression of her . . . of the whole thing. And I'd blurt it clumsily, and you'd think you were going to a nest of maniacs."

"Very well," acquiesced the doctor, with another irrepressible smile at Steven's last extraordinary phrase. "It shall be as you wish. Only tell me this much: Is Miss Warrenger the kind of woman who will speak out to me—a stranger?"

"I don't think that a great doctor is ever a stranger in a time like this," Steven said earnestly. "And if Melany thinks it will help Evan, she'll turn her soul inside out for you like a pocket."

"Good," said Ellerson, with perfect gravity this

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time, and he said nothing more until they arrived at Hilton.

After an interview with Dr. Borridge, and before going to see Radford, he asked Melany if he might speak with her alone. She led him to her own room and, closing the door, turned to him, saying as if in answer to a question:

"I am going to tell you everything. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Yes, I want that very much," replied Ellerson. "You can help me greatly by telling me all that led up to Mr. Radford's present state . . . all that you know of his mental condition beforehand, and the causes of it."

The girl sat down facing him, very pale, but with no other sign of emotion, except the rigid way that she held her hands clasped together in her lap. Something in that white, controlled face, and the dark eyes fixed on his, led Ellerson to say:

"I'm going to remind you before you begin, Miss Warrenger, that science no longer laughs at the kind of things you may have to tell me. They may be understood by us differently from the way that you understand them, we may call them by other names, attribute them to other causes, though very great men among us differ as to that; but we look on such things as essentially real, whatever the cause may be."

"Thank you. You are very kind to say that to me,"

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answered Melany, and he noticed that her interlocked hands quivered. Then she told him, as she had promised, everything.

When she had finished, he said to her as she had said to him before beginning: "Thank you," only instead of, "You are very kind," he added with feeling: "You are very brave."

"No, I'm only not afraid any more," she corrected him simply.

"You don't feel that influence any longer?"

"I'm not afraid of it any longer."

"You mean you've proved to yourself that you are the stronger?"

"Yes, I think so."

"And I know so," said Ellerson, rising, and looking at her with a kindness that she felt like added strength sustaining her. "That is what you must help me prove to him—that he, too, is stronger. Now will you take me to him?"

When they entered the room, Radford was lying with closed eyes, as Steven had described. There was a curious look as of sullen exasperation about those heavy eyelids, as though they rested like stone on the eyes beneath, were sealed stubbornly against the outer world.

Steven, who had been sitting beside the bed, got up as Melany and Dr. Ellerson entered, and moved aside. No one spoke, and the doctor, taking the chair from

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which Steven had risen, drew it round facing Radford. He studied the set face on the pillow in silence for a few moments, then speaking rather sharply said:

"Mr. Radford!"

Radford started, his eyes flew wide and fixed on the dark, unknown face. A look of recognition mingled with resentment lit them.

"Empedocles!" he muttered. Before Ellerson could speak he added mockingly: "You think you brought me back from the dead, don't you?" With infinite scorn he concluded: "It's *you* who're dead, Empedocles!"

The doctor answered quietly, as if correcting an ordinary misapprehension:

"My name is Ellerson—Dr. Ellerson. I've been called in consultation by Dr. Borridge. You have been ill, Mr. Radford, and unconscious a long time."

"Unconscious!" echoed Radford. He stared a second longer, then with a derisive, secretive smile, shut his eyes again and turned away his head.

"Mr. Radford," said Ellerson, in the same practical, quiet tone that he had used before, "your friends have confided certain facts to me. They have interested and impressed me deeply. If you'd consent to talk with me, I'd regard it as a privilege."

Radford, after a slight pause, opened his eyes again and looked at the physician with an expression strangely calculating.

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"Do you think me mad?" he then asked curtly.

"Not in the least," answered Ellerson; "but I think that you've had an experience that doesn't come to one in thousands, and that it has left you naturally exhausted and overkeyed. If it won't be too great an effort, I should like to hear about it from you yourself."

Radford lay gazing at him. Finally he said: "What you think of as life, I think of as death. How are you to understand me?"

"Perhaps I can't, but I'd like to try," replied Ellerson. "You called me Empedocles just now. I suppose you were thinking of the story of Pantheia, of how he was supposed to have raised her from the dead. Now, I don't believe that Pantheia was dead, but in just such a state as you have been in. I've often wondered what she told Empedocles of her experience. You can imagine, can't you, how much I would like to hear something of yours?"

Radford lay still again, his eyes searching the doctor's face. At last he said slowly:

"Well . . . but I don't believe it will have any meaning to you. Somewhere . . . somehow . . . I was the whole of myself . . . yet it wasn't personality, and it was terrible and glorious all in one . . . No! It's no use!" he broke off. "I can't get it over to you. I was a whole . . . free . . . that's all. . . . Now I'm only a part . . . wrapped up in flesh. . . . Horrible stuff!" he ended with a shudder of repulsion, putting his hand

## THE GHOST GARDEN 273

away from him as though it were something unclean. Then he laughed. "What do you make of that?" he demanded ironically.

"That you've entered some mental state of being which can't be described in language," replied Ellerson.

Radford's mocking, defiant expression sobered. He looked at the great doctor with an anxious gathering of his underlids.

"Do you know what it was that happened to me?" he asked. "Everything . . . just before . . . is a dead blank." Suddenly excited, he started up on one elbow, exclaiming fiercely: "Swear on your word of honour that you don't think I'm mad!"

"On my word of honour, you're no more mad than I am," said Ellerson with convincing sincerity. "You have, for some reason which I don't know yet, been in the state called trance. I've never before come in personal contact with such a case. That's one reason why I'm anxious to have your own impressions of it. Does it annoy you to talk with me, or is it perhaps a relief?"

Radford gave a weary, puzzled sigh.

"If I could put it into these beastly things called words, it would be. You see," he added abruptly, "I asked you to tell me that I'm not mad because I've been thinking that I must be."

"No," said Ellerson, "you are not."

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"Then why can't I remember . . . all these people . . . who seem to know me so well?"

"You've had a severe shock. Sometimes a blow on the head will destroy the memory of events that happened a good while previous to the accident. It is like that with you. Gradually you will remember, and what will help you most will be sleep."

"I feel as if I should never sleep again," said Radford.

"I shall give you something that will make you sleep. When you wake, we can talk together again. You will be refreshed, less exhausted. Things will look very different to you."

Radford lay silent as if thinking it over.

"Shall I dream?" he asked.

"I think not," said Ellerson. "What I'm going to give you is really more a nerve sedative than a sleeping draught. It will calm though not stimulate."

"I'd like to sleep . . . without dreaming," Radford said wearily.

"Then," replied the doctor, rising, "I'll go and prepare you the draught."

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## XXXII

**A**N hour later, Radford was sleeping tranquilly. Melany pleaded to watch beside him, but Ellerson insisted that she should go to bed and rest.

"There's much yet before you," he said. "You'll need all your strength. To-morrow I shall want to talk with you again."

She obeyed, but by five the next morning she was at Radford's bedside. The thunderstorm that had been gathering for several days had broken during the night, and the dawn was fresh and cool. A breeze fragrant with wet earth and leaves flickered through the room. It brought to the girl the benison of sweet, normal associations: May mornings of childhood, before that sinister influence had breathed upon her. She gazed at Radford's sleeping face and hope swelled in her heart. It was so different, so blessedly different from what it had been yesterday. All sullenness had left it. The brow was smooth and quiet. The eyelids seemed to rest lightly, not with that terrible sealed look. Would he know her when he wakened? Would he? Would he? . . . Dr. Ellerson had said that he might . . . that indeed it was very probable. . . .



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When it was breakfast time she asked for some coffee to be brought her, so that she need not leave him. At twelve o'clock he was still sleeping. Dr. Ellerson came in and out. Once he suggested that she let him or Steve take her place, saying that Radford might sleep for some hours longer. But she looked at him so imploringly that he hadn't the heart to insist. Blanc, who was always on watch just outside the door, brought her some luncheon, but she couldn't eat it. She didn't feel physically tired, only weary of the endless iteration of the sentence that throbbed in her mind: "Will he know me? Will he know me?"

Dr. Ellerson came in shortly afterward and sat down near her, looking over some note-books. At four o'clock Radford's eyes opened on hers. She thought her heart stopped beating at that look. Full of a vague surprise it rested on her face for a moment, then changed:

"Melany . . ." he said.

The doctor had risen but did not come forward. Steadying her voice, she answered: "Yes, dear. Do you want anything?"

He glanced slowly about him, then back at her.

"I've been ill?" he murmured.

"Yes, dearest, but you're much better . . . so much . . ."

Her voice failed her. The doctor now came up.

"Do you remember me, Mr. Radford?" he asked.

"Dr. Ellerson . . ."

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Radford gazed at him earnestly, knitting his brows. A sudden look of relief smoothed them out again.

"Yes," he said. "You gave me some sleeping stuff. But that's about all I do remember . . ." he wound up ruefully. "Have I been delirious? Have I . . ." He stopped short, and the blood ran up into his white face. "Wait . . ." he muttered. "It's coming back . . ."

Melany gave the doctor a frightened glance. He motioned her to move aside, and sat down by Radford.

"Do you remember my explaining to you just how you had been ill?" he asked.

The flush still on his face, Radford looked hard at him. Then he asked in a peculiar tone:

"Do you think you really know 'just how' I have been ill?"

"I know the name for it at least," said Ellerson pleasantly. "But I rather think that *you* will always know more about it than any one else."

Radford's look was still fixed and defensive.

"I must say you're very modest for one of your profession," he murmured at last.

Ellerson replied with unmoved good humour that doctors *were* apt to be rather cocksure.

This brought no response from Radford, who still seemed to be studying him intently. Presently he said:

"I suppose you don't believe in anything that you can't touch or see?"

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"On the contrary, I believe in thought."

"Oh . . . thought . . ." murmured Radford, still eyeing him.

"But," continued Ellerson, "I believe that thought is a mode of being whose ultimals no one has ever reached."

Radford looked at him curiously for a moment longer, then turning away his eyes, said:

"I want to speak to Miss Warrenger."

As Melany came to him he motioned her to stoop down.

"Melany," he whispered, "I can't get things quite straightened out . . . yet. Are we . . . are we married?"

"No, dear," she whispered back.

He pondered a little, knitting his brow again.

"How long have I been ill?" he asked.

"This is the fourth day, dearest."

"Then it was . . ." But he left the sentence unfinished. As she still bent anxiously over him, he said in another tone from which the hardness had melted: "Melany . . . did *you* drag me back? I seem to remember you calling me . . . calling me . . . for hundreds of years . . . till at last I had to come. But it was horrible . . . like dying . . . like entering a dead body."

He stopped, exhausted, his eyes closing, and the doctor

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touched Melany's shoulder. As she looked up, he said in a low voice:

"He will be better alone for a while. I'll send his servant to him with some nourishment."

Radford did not move or speak as they left the room. Backward and forward his thoughts shot, "swifter than a weaver's shuttle" striving to knit the immediate, unravelled past together, to recall what had happened to him on the day and night before the day set for his wedding. It was sponged clean out, a blank, an irrecoverable gap in being. Had *she* come again? Had he seen her? Had she drawn him from the sheath of his body into the dark ecstasy of liberation in a region outside of space and time which, manifest only to the super-rational mind, was already fading from his earth-bound memory? Was this clogging prison of flesh that caged him indeed not death, as he had first thought on waking up in it again, but what men hold to be life? And was this fragment, this infinitesimal part of himself, called "Evan Radford," all that remained to him of such stupendous wholeness? With these thoughts came suddenly that vertigo of the spirit as if he had plumbed with his naked soul some measureless abyss. . . . As if in some forbidden ecstasy his delight had been also a supreme defiance. What had befallen him? To what unspeakable cosmic secret had he been admitted and cast forth again?

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He had the most extraordinary and torturing sense of spiritual dislocation, as if his ego had been sheared in half, and the separated halves were striving to unite again with throes in which reason dimmed and waned, a weak flame blown upon by gusts from malign stars. . . . He sat up with a cry, throwing the sheet aside as if suffocating, and clasping his drenched forehead in his hands.

Dr. Ellerson, who had returned to the room as soon as he had persuaded Melany to remain away for a time, was at his side in an instant.

"Talk out to me. You can trust me to understand," he said. "I am not one of the doctors who think everything is explicable in terms of science."

"Talk out!" Radford exclaimed. "How am I to 'talk' of what I can't express to myself even in thought!"

Ellerson didn't reply for a moment, then he said:

"There is a state called by the Hindus, if I remember correctly, 'shushupti' or the deepest sleep. When the body is in that condition they believe that the soul or spirit of man escapes to the centre of being, but that on awaking he can't recall his experience clearly. Perhaps your experience has been something like that."

"You believe such a thing possible?" said Radford, amazed and arrested.

"The little that I know, or that any one knows, of such things makes me think it may not be impossible,"

## THE GHOST GARDEN 281

replied Ellerson. "Even ordinary sleep is a mystery. Of its physiological side, science knows nothing. Metaphysically and psychologically it is scarcely better understood, in my opinion. So you can gather how profoundly ignorant we are in regard to the mental state called trance. All that I really know about the facts in your case is that you have been, to all intents and purposes, what is called 'dead,' and are now, what is called 'alive.' And yet, from your own impression of your sensations during trance you seem to have been intensely 'alive' mentally all the while."

"So 'alive,'" remarked Radford with grimness, "that I thought I was dead when I first came, as you've put it, 'to life' again . . . here . . ." He looked for one instant as if he were about to say something further on the subject, and Ellerson waited, hoping devoutly that he would, but when he spoke it was only to ask how long it would be before his wits stopped "wool gathering."

"You must remember that you've gone through a mental and physical experience calculated to unnerve a cave man," answered Ellerson, smiling. "Don't be impatient with yourself . . . or discouraged if your mind doesn't adjust itself at once to its normal balance. As a rule, from what I have read and heard on the subject, people coming out of trance bring with them no memories, no dreams. It's as if they had fallen asleep one instant and waked the next. With you it has

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been different. You've expressed a sense of countless ages having passed . . . of . . ."

"When did I say that?" interrupted Radford quickly.

"When you first regained consciousness, to your friend and Miss Warrenger. I'm telling you these things because I want you to realise that what you must do, if you wish to help me to help you, is to remain as relaxed, mind and body, as *unthinking* as you can. . . . Hasheesh produces that sense of eternities passing over one. It is said to be a terrible experience. You can't expect to regain your normal state at once, but physically you are quite sound. Dr. Borridge's diagnosis of your heart trouble was correct. It was strictly functional, produced by intense nervous strain."

As he spoke he was observing closely the effect on Radford of those professional statements with their appeal to his reason rather than to his emotions.

The young man listened quietly, but looked past the speaker to the open window. When Ellerson paused, however, he turned his eyes to him, and said in a level, carefully controlled voice:

"Can you tell me whether I shall be liable to such . . . 'experiences' in future?"

Ellerson's regard was steady and full of grave meaning.

"That," he answered, "will depend chiefly upon your own will and actions."

Instantly there came into Radford's look a darkening,

as of a veil dropped between his inner self and the man who was striving to perceive it.

"He will never speak to me or to any one about this from his inmost thought," decided Ellerson instantly. And whether the poet in him, or the scientist, most regretted this, he could not have told.

"Please explain," Radford was saying in a tone even more carefully modulated than before, "exactly what you mean by that?"

Ellerson, who had swiftly decided on what his own tone should be, replied at once:

"I mean that you should not think of returning to the place where you went through your strange seizure, for a long time if ever. And that as soon as you are strong enough, you should make an entire change of surroundings—leave this neighbourhood and its associations, travel for some months at least."

Radford's face by now was a polite mask. "That's a very easy programme," he said; "I'm to be married as soon as I'm fit again, and one usually travels. Is that all?"

The doctor looked at him consideringly. "I should like," he said, "to have you under my observation for a time. Would you consent to that?"

Radford's own look sharpened.

"You mean go to a sanatorium?" he asked suspiciously.

"No. I shouldn't want that. Suppose you come to



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New York for a week or two, then go to some place near my country house, say for a month?"

Radford looked gloomy and obstinate at this prospect.

"I'd rather not . . . thanks," he said. "Can't you leave directions with Dr. Borridge?"

"I can't leave him my experience," replied Ellerson somewhat quizzically. "And that's what I want to put at your service."

"Thanks," muttered Radford again. "But I'd rather not. I tell you what I'll do, though," he added. "I'll promise to come to you for as long as you like if . . . if this sort of thing threatens to nab me again."

They talked over matters at some length and in conclusion Radford asked:

"When should you say I'd be strong enough to be married?"

"That depends a good deal upon yourself also," Ellerson answered. "As soon as you feel that you're well, I shall consider you well."

"Then I fancy I'll be all right in a few days," said Radford. "And now if you don't mind I think I'll try for another sleep . . . that stuff you gave me is certainly effective . . ."

"It was only a rather strong dose of Bromide of sodium," returned Ellerson, smiling and rising. "I'll go and tell Miss Warrenger the good news that you're going to sleep again. Rest and change are, after all, what you most need."

### XXXIII

ELLERSON wished to leave that evening, especially as Dr. Borridge was to remain with them some time longer, but all implored him so earnestly to stay until the next day that he consented. In the late afternoon, while Radford was still sleeping and Melany watching with him, Ellerson asked Steven to take him over to "Her Wish." Besides his interest in visiting the scene of his patient's strange adventure, he acknowledged, smiling, a great curiosity to see the home of the perverse ghost whose story had been told him at length that morning by Mr. Warringer, and whose letters he had afterwards read.

Steven of course consented, though not enthusiastically, and his evident reluctance, which he tried at all times to hide, interested the great man as much as the proposed visit. He thought that there must really be some very unusual atmosphere about a place that could affect so many entirely different people in such a powerful way. He was aware of feeling that he would have liked, under other circumstances, to repeat Radford's vigil there.

After supper, as Melany joined him on the lawn where he was smoking a very meditative cigar, he told her rather abruptly where he had been that afternoon.

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Even in the starlight he could see the sudden rigidity of her slight figure, as she stopped short.

"The whole place has an extraordinary personality," he continued, as if not noticing anything unusual in her manner, "I can understand certain things much better since I've been there."

There was a dead pause, then Melany said falteringly:

"Did you . . ." but broke off again, leaving the question unfinished.

He replied as if she had completed it.

"What I did—what I went there chiefly to do—was to put myself as much as possible in the place of my patient when he was there. After doing so, as I said, I had a clearer idea of the present situation and what led up to it. Given his sensitiveness to certain impressions of which you've told me, your belief in them, his desire to help you, and the atmosphere of that place, saturated with what must have been a singularly compelling and fascinating personality . . . given these things, your and his belief in them above all, and it is plain to me that he couldn't have escaped without some grave mental crisis. I am also more than ever convinced that he should never return there, even for a short time, even after he has entirely recovered."

As she did not answer at once, he added:

"This is a hard saying, I know. It's a beautiful old place. He must be very fond of it."

"He told me . . . that last evening . . . that he

## THE GHOST GARDEN 287

would sell it," Melany murmured. "But now I don't know . . ."

Ellerson interrupted with authority:

"You must keep him to it, Miss Warrenger. Such things can't be tampered with. They must be snapped off short."

In the pale light her face looked up at him passive and dejected.

"How can I keep him to it?" she said gently. "Since he . . . came back . . . he's so different. It's as if . . ." she turned her face away, "I don't think he . . . cares . . . as he did."

Ellerson felt a great compassion for her. Her gentle self-control appealed to him enormously.

"Ah, there you must be patient," he said. "After such an abnormal experience a man can't become normal again at once. But it's only a question of time before he returns fully to himself . . . to you. However," and here he stopped in his turn to give his words more weight, "I can promise nothing unless he is prevented from going again to 'Her Wish.'"

"I would do anything to keep him from it!" she cried. "*Anything!* . . ." With sudden passion she added: "Oh, how I would like to burn it to the ground!"

To check this outburst, which he was afraid might result in her breaking down altogether after the long strain, he said smilingly:

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"I don't think we'll have to resort to violent measures. I've spoken about it to him already. He will see for himself as he gets stronger that it won't do for him to return there. And he has promised to put himself under my care if he feels any premonitions of the sort again. I thought it better not to insist at present. You must let me know day by day how he progresses."

Melany made no reply. Her eyes were fixed, wide and still, in the direction of "Her Wish."

He spoke her name. As she started violently, turning to him, he said:

"You mustn't go back to old broodings, you know. You've won. Think of that . . . keep your thoughts fixed on it."

She had an abrupt and unexpected response for this:

"Tell me," she said, "do you think it has all been just . . . thought?"

Ellerson took a last, deep pull at his cigar, threw away what remained of it, and turning to a bench nearby, said:

"Suppose we sit here a while. No one will interrupt us, and I'll answer you to the best of my ability."

But after they were seated he didn't speak for some moments. When he did his words surprised her.

"I know no more than you do what it has 'all' been," he said. "Your thoughts and his have of course played a tremendous part in it. . . . You, for instance, have been clearly under the dominion of a fixed idea . . .

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(I'll try not to be technical) . . . and he, being so strongly under your influence, felt the power of that idea in you. Such ideas, dwelt upon and fostered, are capable of producing almost incredible results. For instance," he looked at her consideringly as he paused here an instant, "it will astonish you, I think, to know that in my opinion the loss of your voice was purely the result of such an *idée fixe*. . . . That it is in fact not lost but, as one might say, mislaid." He smiled at her very kindly. "That if you continue to resist even memories of what so overwhelmed you in the past, you will find your voice again, as suddenly as you seemed to lose it."

She stared at him, her hands clasped so tightly that he saw her arms trembling.

"My voice?" she stammered. "You think my voice . . . may come back again?"

"I do," he said quietly. "If you turn away resolutely from this place and the thoughts it has bred in you. I may even say that I'm convinced of it."

Her hands went suddenly to her face, and to cover her emotion he continued speaking.

"So you see what a great force I consider thought. However, when you ask me if I think that in this strange case thought has been '*all*,' I can only repeat what I said at first: I do not know. Scientists far greater than I, would believe thoroughly in the mystic side of it, the side that you believe in, but there I find myself agnostic.

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I simply do not know. This much I can say, though, and say heartily, that I do believe there are mysteries which science has never explained, and never will explain. And even if some day it should penetrate deeper into them, I am certain that it will find itself only in the vestibule, as it were, of still greater mysteries. And I am devoutly glad of it, because I can think of no more horrible thing than a universe without mystery. Which you'll admit," he wound up, smiling, "is a very queer statement for a scientist to make, seeing that our chief object is to solve mysteries."

They didn't talk much after that. Melany was too absorbed in the wonderful new idea that had been given her, to be able to turn her mind from it, and Ellerson was anxious that the impression his words had evidently made shouldn't be lessened.

Her voice . . . her voice might come back! Surely if that were possible, all things were possible. . . .

When she said good-bye to him next day, there was a life, a vigour, in her look and words that made her seem like a new being.

"I can't thank you," she said; "but you know. And I won't fail. I won't disappoint you. I'll save him if I have to take him by force to the ends of the earth. If I have to . . ." She stopped, her colour leaping, a note almost of exultant laughter in her voice: "I'll save him!" she repeated. "No matter how."

In confirmation of her intuitive, almost religious, be-

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lie in the wisdom of the great doctor, a week had scarcely passed before Radford became again the Evan that she had known and loved. He was still too weak to do more than lounge on the upper porch for some hours every day, but he begged that they should be married as soon as possible. She was afraid to tell him what Dr. Ellerson had said about her voice. They never alluded to the past or to "Her Wish." And she was afraid also to try to sing. Some day, when Evan was quite strong again, when they were married and far away from here, she would go out in some beautiful, lonely place and see if the miracle would come to pass. Now it was quite joy enough to meet his eyes with that look in them, and listen to *his* voice vibrating with the old tenderness . . .

One afternoon, between her and Steven, he walked for half an hour in the garden, then returned to his own room, where Melany was to have tea alone with him. He leaned in an armchair beside the open window while she prepared it, watching her slight, swift hands, thinking in a dreamy way that it was pleasant to feel tired with this languid almost voluptuous tiredness of convalescence, and that one of its chief delights was the way that it extended even to his brain, preventing those confused, explosive thoughts that at first had so exhausted him. The immediate past seemed very dim this afternoon, like the vaguely remembered dreams of fever . . . he couldn't recall them as a clear impression, only that



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they had been terrible and confused. Sometime when he was quite well again he meant to ask Melany about everything. . . . Now he only wanted this soft, fluent peace, where his mind seemed to float as in a milky medium that obscured thought. . . .

They had their tea together, and Blanc took away the tea things. When he had gone, Radford, smiling drowsily at the girl as she sat opposite him arranging some white tulips in a vase, murmured:

"I say, dearest . . . let's be married to-morrow and go for a long cruise. I've 'a great wish' for the sea."

"Very well," assented Melany serenely, though her colour waxed and waned in the way he thought so adorable. "To-morrow then . . ."

"Will you really?" he exclaimed, and sat up, throwing off his pleasant lethargy with amazing ease. "Really? Without fuss or feathers? Just Steven and your father?" As she nodded, her eyes on the tulips, he reached out his hands to her across the table, saying eagerly: "Come! Put your hands in mine and promise. . . ."

She laid her hands in his, and as she did so a curious flicker ran across his eyes and face; he went white, drawing a breath sharply through his nostrils, his hands relaxed, loosing hers, and he sat stiff and fixed, his look focussed on some point far beyond her.

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## XXXIV

**I**T was then for the first time that Melany became aware of that faint, stealing scent of damask roses, faint yet overwhelming in its strangeness, for the roses were over in the garden at Hilton, and even when they bloomed there were no damask roses among them. She sat for a breathless second as stony and fixed as Radford, then sprang to her feet and ran to him, catching him in her arms.

"Evan!" she cried. "Evan!"

As if from a long distance his voice came blurred and faint:

"It's nothing. . . ."

He was staring into huge, lustrous portals like those the summer lightning reveals in a towering cloud. . . . He seemed to remember once having passed through them. . . . Between him and Melany a fine, iridescent veil of broken filaments was swaying. . . . Memory quickened . . . beyond those portals lay a region of wild ravishment, of rapture keen as anguish, more wonderful than joy. . . . The innermost ultimate solution . . . entirety. . . .

She grasped his face in both hands, turning it sharply to hers. "Evan! Evan!" she cried again. With a

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spasm like that which wrenches one from a cataleptic dream, he recovered himself, his conscious eyes stared into hers, then he shut them, sinking back from her and murmuring again thickly:

"It's nothing . . . nothing . . ."

But she wouldn't let him sink deeper into that delicious stupor; her voice, her hands, dragged him to the surface, held him there.

"Look at me. . . . You *must* look at me . . . ." she kept repeating. "I've something to tell you . . . something wonderful . . ." And hardly knowing what she uttered, she began to tell him what Ellerson had said about her voice. What she had imagined about finding it again in some far away, beautiful place where they would go when they were married . . . after they were married to-morrow. . . . How strange it was, wasn't it! To think that to-morrow was so nearly to-day! By this time to-morrow they would be far from here, rushing into the future together, the future they'd so often dreamed of together.

He seemed to collect himself fully as she talked on, smiled at her, said that she was very wonderful to be willing to marry such a "blithering invalid." She laughed out in gratitude for the bit of homely slang. It put all ghastly, ghostly things at such a quaint, proper distance. . . . And his look too was so natural now, rested on her so frankly, with none of that dreadful flicker in it of a consciousness that she couldn't share.

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After a while, he asked for a glass of wine and she ran to fetch it from the table by his bed. When she came back with it, between his sips he said in a would-be casual tone, his eyes on the wine-glass:

"By the way . . . before we're married to-morrow, I'll have to get Blanc to drive me over to 'Her Wish' . . . I've some important papers there that no one else can get for me . . ."

Every drop of blood left her face. She couldn't suppress a cry, and grasping his chair to keep herself erect, she looked at him in dread and wonder. The look with which he answered hers horrified her even more. There was in it so calculated, so cunningly moderate a surprise.

"You surely can't think me too weak to drive the short distance to 'Her Wish,' when we're going to start on a long journey soon afterward?" he asked, still regarding her with that false, subtle look.

She thought in quick flashes while he was speaking, and managed to answer in a natural voice:

"You know" Dr. Ellerson thought you'd better not go back to 'Her Wish' for a long time, Evan."

His eyes left hers and he said with some coldness:

"I'm not going for a 'long time' but for an hour or two, to collect some important papers."

She hesitated in anguish, then said softly:

"If I beg you not to go there, surely you won't go?"

"I'm sorry, but I must. It's . . ." His voice

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caught a second, then he ended, firmly, almost sullenly, "It's necessary . . . absolutely necessary."

Again she thought with convulsive quickness. Dropping on her knees beside him, she laid her hand on his shoulders. Her voice quivering with tragic love, she pleaded:

"Dearest, I've never asked you for anything. I ask you this as if I were asking for my life. . . . Don't, don't go back to that place!"

She saw his eyes fill second by second with hostility.

"I can't believe that you'll really ask me to refrain from something that I tell you is vitally important . . ." he said at last.

"You'll go? . . . Even if it hurts me so desperately?"

He turned from her. In a stifled, rigid voice he repeated twice: "*I must go . . .*"

Then Melany made up her mind what she would do. The idea had flared in her during her last talk with Ellerson, a fierce thought, reckless and lawless, that she had felt must be subdued. But now, as it leaped up stronger than ever, she knew that she would carry it out to the utmost, beyond chance of failure.

That night "Her Wish" burned to the ground. The fire must have broken out about one o'clock, for it was nearly two when Steven was roused by the glare that lit up the near heavens and the trees on Mist Mountain as by a gigantic display of Bengal lights. He flung on

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his clothes and rushed out into the hall, to find himself face to face with Radford, who was also dressed. Melany and Blanc were trying to restrain him from going downstairs, and he was repelling their efforts with angry impatience. His face, crazed and furious, was that of a man who has reached the limit of self-control. He gasped in his effort to speak intelligently, choked and stammered on the words: "I must go, I tell you! . . . I must . . . I *must!* . . ." Then violently to Blanc: "Let go of me! . . . Let go of me, you fool!" Steven sprang forward, and grasping him by the shoulder tried to reason with him. Insane with some frightful emotion, Radford struck him violently in the face. At Melany's cry, Steven, dazed for a second, recovered himself, and flinging his arms about Radford, pinioned him without more ado, calling to Blanc to help him. The three men swayed to and fro for some moments, Radford's frenzied strength being more than equal to that of the other two. Just when it seemed as if he would wrench himself free, he gave a dreadful scream, like the scream of a wounded horse, and collapsed, hanging a dead weight between them.

They carried him to his bed, and as soon as Dr. Borridge had pronounced him to be in no immediate danger, Steven took Blanc, and rode to "Her Wish" in case there might be still time to save something from the house.

Arrived there, however, they found that there was

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nothing to do but stand and watch the conflagration helplessly.

The old home was aflame from wing to wing, and from the central hall, of which the roof had already crashed in, the voluming splendour poured skyward as from a crater, lighting up the country for leagues around and roaring with the huge, greedy, jeering voice of fire.

To Steven, still shaken from that painful encounter with his friend, it seemed as if he looked on the burning of a sentient thing; as if more than the beautiful old house were being consumed in those savage flames. . . . And though he regarded himself with contempt for the "superstitious" feeling, in his secret heart he was glad that "Her Wish" would soon be only ashes and bare, charred walls. . . .

To Melany, next morning, came one of those astounding surprises which life sometimes offers when we have no more hope. Just as the dawn broke, Radford started up in bed, and, seeing her, cried joyously:

"Melany! . . . I told you I would win! . . . That my love was stronger than *she* was!"

She gazed at him, unable to speak.

He caught her hand, drawing her nearer. His face was vivid with life. Weakness had slipped from him like a shadow.

"Don't you understand?" he said eagerly. "She's gone! . . . For good this time! . . . We're rid of her

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for good . . . for *good*, darling! You can live at 'Her Wish' now without a qualm! Or we'll sell it . . . just as you like."

She couldn't let him see her face. She clung to him with her eyes hidden against his arm, as he lay back upon the pillows, smiling triumphantly. The terrible house was in ashes and he didn't know it! The miracle had happened and he thought that it was *his* miracle. She would rather have it that way. . . . It was best for him to think so. . . .

Yet in spite of this "miracle," during all the years that followed, whenever he caught unexpectedly the breath of roses, or the gleam of iridescence on morning cobwebs or flying foam, or clouds, there would sweep over him a strange emotion sensed with the flower of the spirit rather than of the mind, a shudder of the soul fearful yet entrancing, as if there were interwoven with the perfume a spell that wrought for the dissolving of personality; as if the iridescence might suddenly spread into a vast curtain, drifting between him and the known world, veiling with its suave folds the edge of a measureless abyss. . . .

THE END